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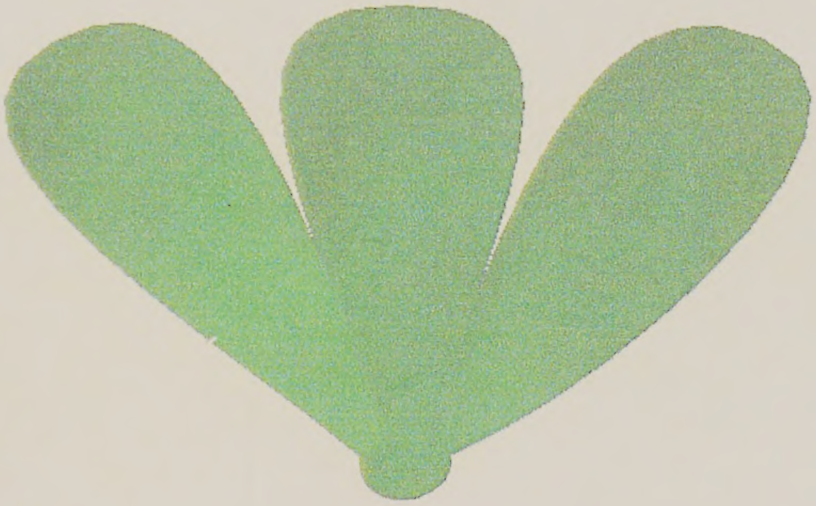
Luck, Loss and the Kindness of Strangers

Fragments from my Life as a Child and Youth



Werner Jacob Lipton

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Luck, Loss and the Kindness of Strangers

Fragments from my Life as a Child and Youth

Werner Jacob Lipton

For information regarding this book, contact:

Werner J. Lipton
4550 E. Redlands
Fresno, CA 93726-6228

Phone 559/229-8486 Fax 559/229-1829

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Luck, Loss and the Kindness of Strangers

GUIDE TO ILLUSTRATIONS

Photos

My parents and I, 1938.

My maternal grandparents, Helene (Gundelfinger) and Isidor Bach, 1903, the year they were married.

My father and his four sisters; l. to r., sitting, Berta and Helene; standing, Erna and Irma, who died at 20 from a botched medical treatment, i.e. excessive iodine to treat a thyroid condition. Year of photo unknown, but before 1923.

I, between one and two years old.

Maps

Southern Germany with locations of importance in my childhood.

Portions of Switzerland where I lived, attended school and visited

Documents

Heimatschein

Confirms that I was a German citizen as of 12 August, 1939. Note that I was required to add the middle name Israel so anyone who read the document immediately would know that I was Jewish.

Wohnsitz....

Affirms that I was a resident of Mænnedorf since 3 April, 1942, that I was stateless, and that I had no criminal record.

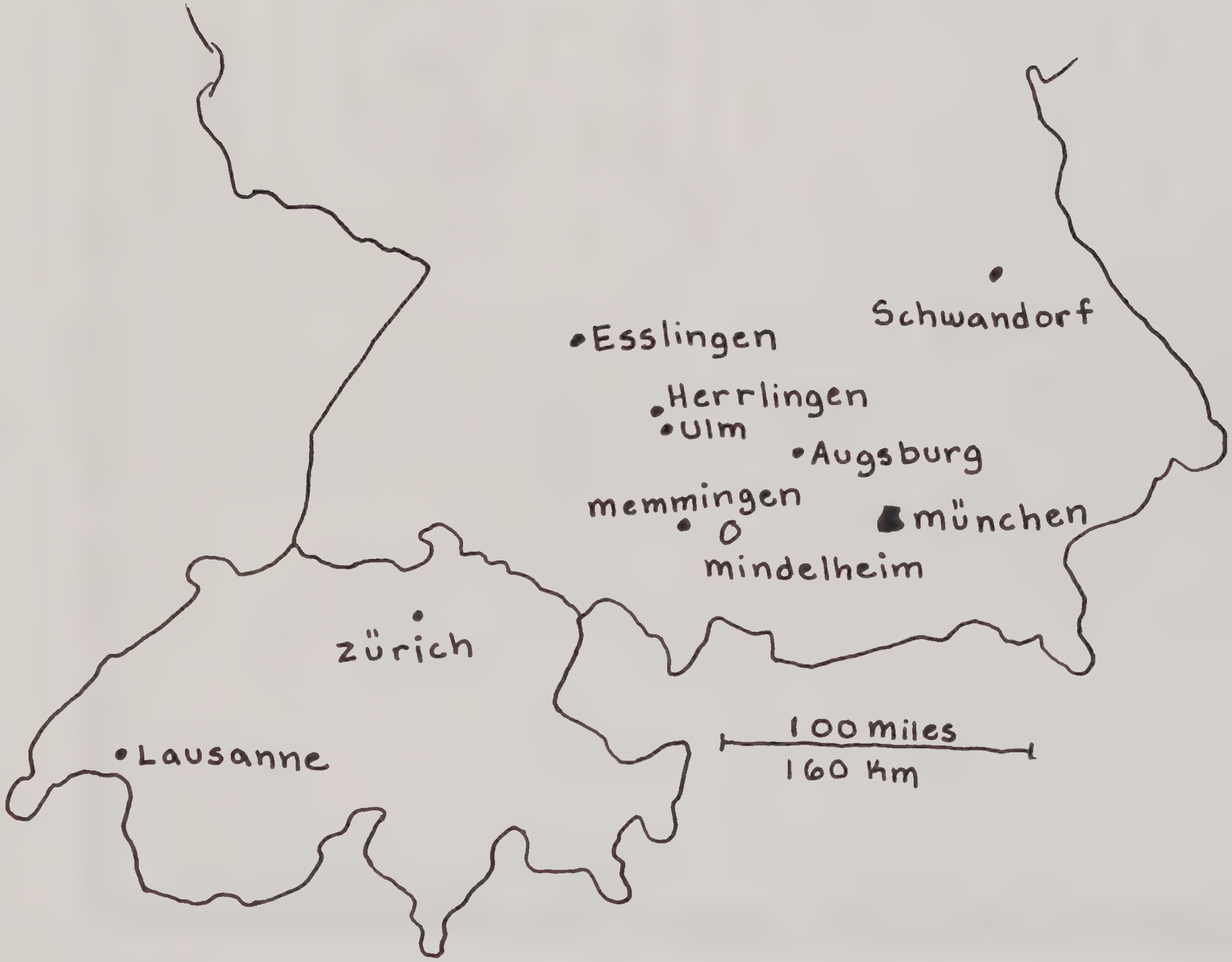
Certificat d'identité (on three pages)

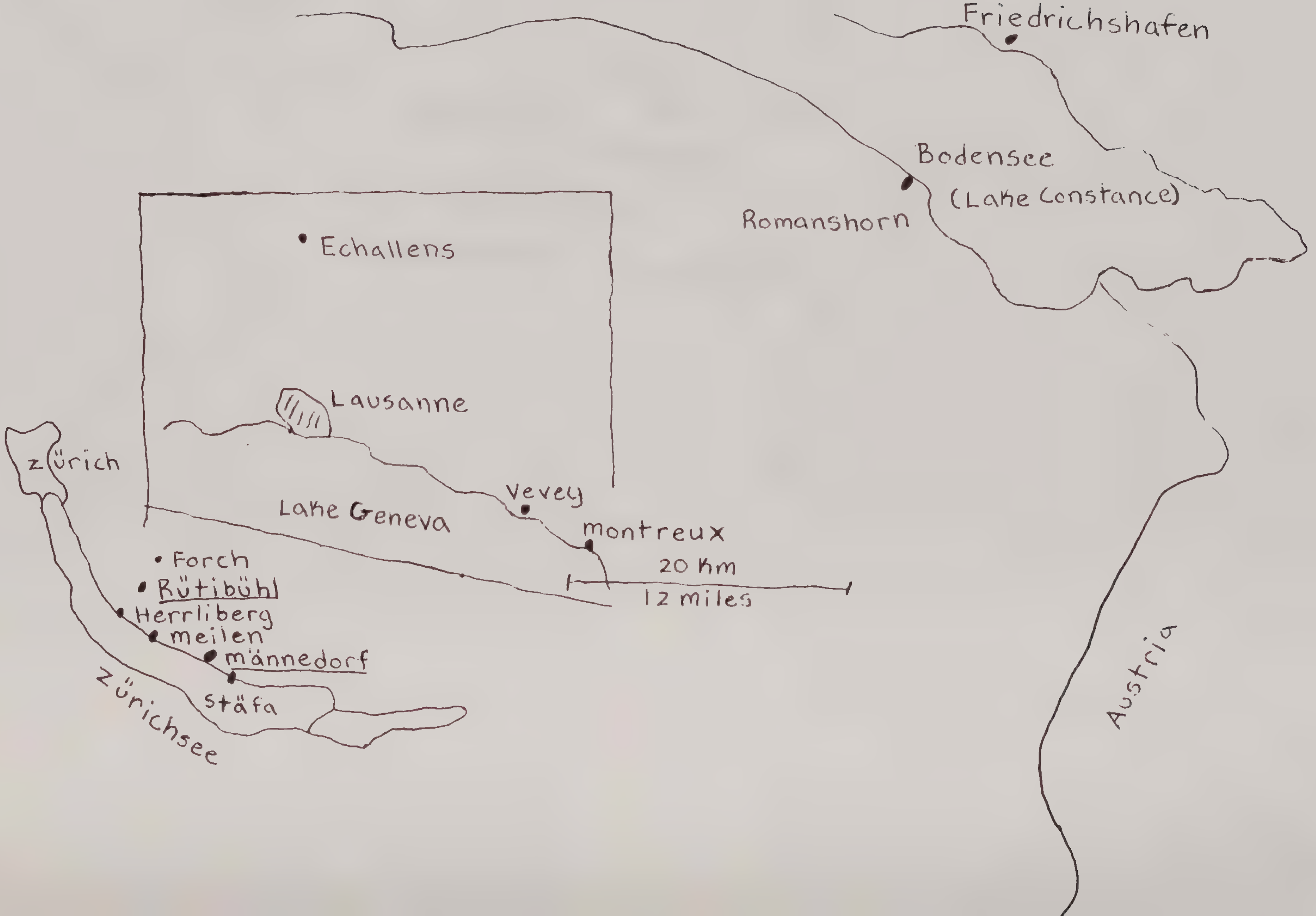
Certifies that I am who I claim to be. Was a substitute for a passport, because, being stateless, I could not get one.

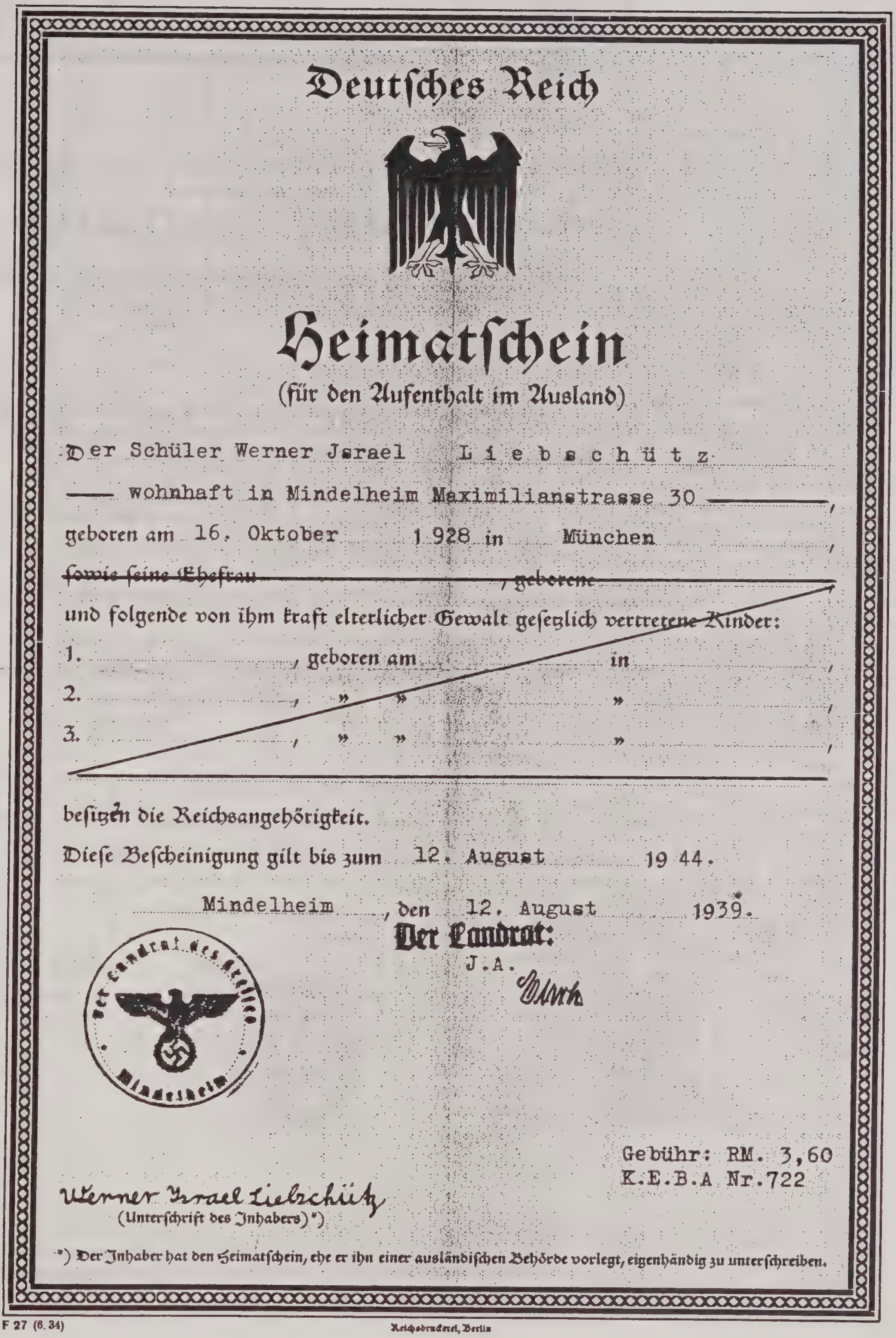
Three stamped entries are transit visas for France, Luxemburg, and Belgium, which I did not need, since I travelled via Italy. The transit visa for Italy is on the following page.

The fourth and fifth documents (upper right quadrant) are the immigration visa for the United States and the verification that I landed at Baltimore on 18 May, 1946, respectively.

Gebrüder Lützel, kgl. bayr. Hofphotographen. München.


Schwandorf
Esslingen
Herrlingen
Ulm
Augsburg
memmingen
münchen
mindelheim
zürich
Lausanne
100 miles
160 km


Friedrichshafen
Bodensee
(Lake Constance)
Romanshorn
Echallens
Lausanne
zürich
Vevey
Lake Geneva
montreux
20 km
12 miles
Forch
Rütibühl
Herrliberg
meilen
männedorf
stäfa
zürichsee
Austria



Deutſches Reich

Heimatſchein

(für den Aufenthalt im Ausland)

Der Schüler Werner Jsrael Liebschütz

wohnhaft in Mindelheim Maximilianstrasse 30,

geboren am 16. Oktober 1928 in München,

~~ſowie ſeine Ehefrau~~, ~~geborene~~

und folgende von ihm kraft elterlicher Gewalt geſetzlich ~~vertretene Kinder~~:

1. , geboren am in ,
2. , „ „ „ ,
3. , „ „ „ ,

beſitzen die Reichsangehörigkeit.

Dieſe Beſcheinigung gilt bis zum 12. August 1944.

Mindelheim, den 12. August 1939.

Der Landrat:

J.A.

Gebühr: RM. 3,60
K.E.B.A Nr.722

Werner Israel Liebschütz
(Unterſchrift des Inhabers)*)

*) Der Inhaber hat den Heimatſchein, ehe er ihn einer ausländiſchen Behörde vorlegt, eigenhändig zu unterſchreiben.

F 27 (6. 34)

Reichsdruckerei, Berlin

GEMEINDERAT MÄNNEDORF KANTON ZÜRICH

Wohnsitz- und Leumunds-Zeugnis

(Gemäss § 76 des Gesetzes über das Gemeindewesen vom 6. Juni 1926)

Die unterzeichnete Gemeindebehörde bezeugt, dass Werner Liebschütz, geb. 16.Oktober 1928, staatenlos, Schüler, bei P. Spoerry, auf Dorf, Männedorf,

seit 3. April 1942 in hiesiger Gemeinde wohnt und laut unsern Registern in bürgerlichen Rechten und Ehren steht.

Vorstrafen: sind hierorts keine eingetragen.

Ausgestellt auf Verlangen des obgenannten W.J. Liebschütz zuhanden des amerikanischen Konsulates in Zürich.

Männedorf, den 18. Oktober 1945.

Namens des Gemeinderates

Der Präsident:

Der Schreiber:

Zgn.-Reg.-Nr. 65.

Gebühr Fr. 1.—

---

§ 76 des Gemeindegesetzes lautet: Die Gemeinderäte stellen auf Verlangen von Amtsstellen Leumundszeugnisse aus. Ebenso ist jedermann berechtigt, für sich ein solches zu verlangen. Das Leumundszeugnis gibt Auskunft, ob die darin genannte Person in bürgerlichen Rechten und Ehren steht, ferner über allfällige Verurteilungen zu Freiheitsstrafen. Bedingte Verurteilungen und Einträge, die im Strafregister gestrichen sind, dürfen im Leumundszeugnis nicht erwähnt werden. Amtsstellen gegenüber sind alle Vorstrafen aufzuführen.

CONFÉDÉRATION SUISSE · SCHWEIZERISCHE EIDGENOSSENSCHAFT · CONFEDERAZIONE SVIZZERA

Gratis.

Certificat d'identité
Identitätsausweis
Certificato d'identità

No. 3510

La Division de police du Département fédéral de justice et police certifie, après examen, l'identité de l'étranger sans papiers ci-dessous désigné:

Die Polizeiabteilung des eidgenössischen Justiz- und Polizeidepartements bescheinigt auf Grund der von ihr vorgenommenen Prüfung die Identität des nachgenannten schriftenlosen Ausländers:

La Divisione della polizia del Dipartimento federale di giustizia e polizia attesta, in base all'esame da essa compiuto, l'identità dello straniero indicato qui sotto sprovvisto di documenti:

Nom de famille / Familienname / Cognome: Liebschutz

Prénoms / Vornamen / Nomi: Werner

Né le / Geboren am / Nato il: 16 octobre 1928 à / in / a: Munich

Profession / Beruf / Professione: écolier

Observations / Bemerkungen / Osservazioni:

Signalement - Connotati

Stature / Gestalt / Statura: 164 cm

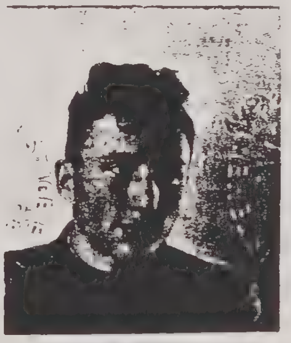
Cheveux / Haare / Capelli: noirs

Yeux / Augen / Occhi: bruns

Nez / Nase / Naso: normal

Visage / Gesicht / Viso: ovale

Signes particuliers / Besondere Kennzeichen / Segni particolari: ./.



Signature du titulaire: Unterschrift des Inhabers: Firma del titolare:

Werner Liebschutz

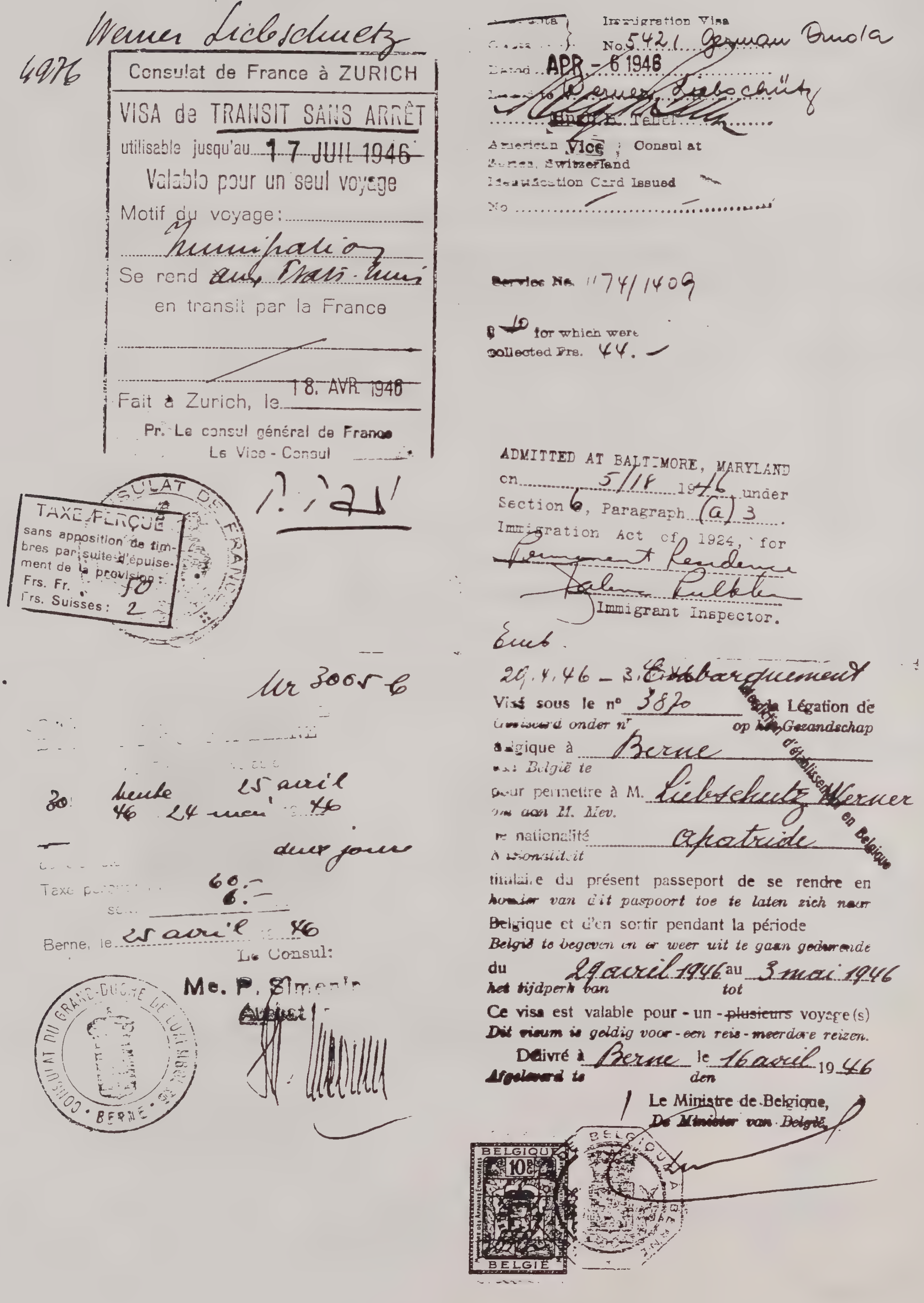
Ce certificat est valable jusqu'au / Dieser Ausweis ist gültig bis zum / Il presente certificato è valido fino al: 22 novembre 1946

Délivré à Berne, le / Ausgestellt in Bern, am / Rilasciato a Berna, il: 22 novembre 1945

Le Chef de la Division de Police
Der Chef der Polizeiabteilung
Il Capo della Divisione della Polizia

p.o.

Après l'expiration de sa validité, le certificat doit être renvoyé à l'autorité qui l'a délivré.
Nach Erlöschen seiner Gültigkeit ist der Ausweis der Behörde, die ihn ausgestellt hat, zurückzugeben.
Non appena sarà spirata la sua validità, il certificato dovrà essere rispedito all'autorità che l'ha rilasciato.



Werner Liebschutz

4976

Consulat de France à ZURICH

VISA de TRANSIT SANS ARRÊT

utilisable jusqu'au 17 JUIL 1946

Valable pour un seul voyage

Motif du voyage: Immigration

Se rend aux États-Unis

en transit par la France

Fait à Zurich, le 18. AVR. 1946

Pr. Le consul général de France

Le Vice-Consul

TAXE PERÇUE

sans apposition de timbres par suite d'épuisement de la provision:

Frs. Fr. 50

Frs. Suisses: 2

Nr 3005 C

20 heures 25 avril 46 24 mai 1946

deux jours

Taxe perçue 60.–

6.–

Berne, le 25 avril 1946

Le Consul:

Me. P. Simen[illegible]

CONSULAT DU GRAND-DUCHÉ DE LUXEMBOURG · BERNE

~~Nonquota~~ } Immigration Visa

Quota } No. 5421 German Quota

Dated APR - 6 1946

Issued to Werner Liebschütz

Hugh H. Teller

American Vice Consul at

Zurich, Switzerland

Identification Card Issued

No

Service No. 1174/1409

$ 10 for which were

collected Frs. 44.–

ADMITTED AT BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

on 5/18 1946 under

Section 6, Paragraph (a) 3

Immigration Act of 1924, for

Permanent Residence

Immigrant Inspector.

Emb.

29.4.46 – 3. Embarquement

Visé sous le nº 3870 à la Légation de
Geviseerd onder nr op het Gezandschap

Belgique à Berne
van België te

pour permettre à M. Liebschutz Werner
om aan H. Mev.

de nationalité Apatride
van nationaliteit

titulaire du présent passeport de se rendre en
houder van dit paspoort toe te laten zich naar

Belgique et d'en sortir pendant la période
België te begeven en er weer uit te gaan gedurende

du 29 avril 1946 au 3 mai 1946
het tijdperk van tot

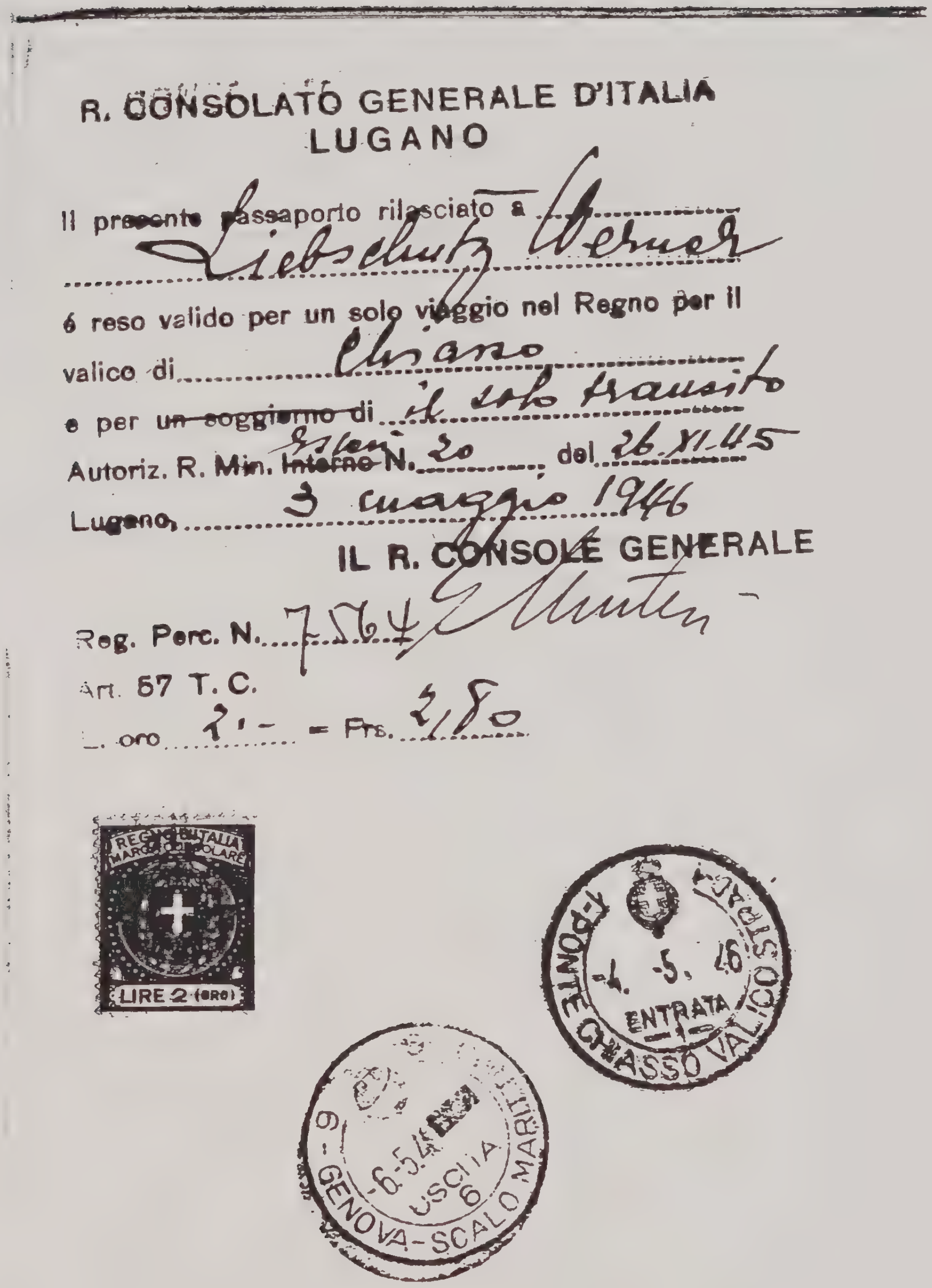
Ce visa est valable pour - un - ~~plusieurs~~ voyage(s)
Dit visum is geldig voor - een reis - meerdere reizen.

Délivré à Berne le 16 avril 1946
Afgeleverd te den

Le Ministre de Belgique,
De Minister van België,

d'établissement en Belgique

BELGIQUE 10F BELGIË



R. CONSOLATO GENERALE D'ITALIA
LUGANO

Il presente passaporto rilasciato a Liebschutz Werner

è reso valido per un solo viaggio nel Regno per il

valico di Chiasso

e per ~~un soggiorno~~ di il solo transito

Autoriz. R. Min. Esteri ~~Interno~~ N. 20 del 26.XI.45

Lugano, 3 maggio 1946

IL R. CONSOLE GENERALE

Reg. Perc. N. 7564

Art. 67 T. C.

L. oro 2.- = Frs. 2,80

REGNO D'ITALIA
MARCA CONSOLARE
LIRE 2 (ORO)

PONTE CHIASSO VALICO STRADALE
-4. -5. 46
ENTRATA
-1-

GENOVA-SCALO MARITTIMO
-6-5.4
USCITA
6

Luck, Loss and the Kindness of Strangers

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Luck, Loss and the Kindness of Strangers

Fragments from my Life as a Child and Youth

Werner Jacob Lipton

Luck, Loss and the Kindness of Strangers

Fragments from my Life as a Child and Youth

I dedicate these pages to the memory of my parents, Jakob and Fanni Liebschütz, and to all those of my relatives who also were exterminated by Nazi Germany and to the relatives, care-givers, friends, and one-time strangers who helped me overcome loss and heartbreak by their generosity of heart and purse, by their understanding and love.

I thank all those who provided information, refreshed memories, and cleared up confusion, those now deceased and those still in the circle of family and friends, principally: Aunts Helen Heilbronner, Erna Landsberg, and Lillian Friedman; cousins of various degrees, Walter, and his widow Florence Heilbronner, Hans Heilbronner, George Adler, and Lee Fischer (Liesel Einstein); in Switzerland, Elisabeth Bachmann (neé Spoerry) and her daughther Claudia Roth, Doris Bollag, high school friends Fritz and Hanni Kaiser; in Germany, friend of many years, Werner Trapp, dedicated chronicler of the persecution of Jews in Swabia, Gernot Rœmer and Gudrun Weckerle, sister of Jakob Fries. For perceptive editorial suggestions I thank Phyllis Heilbronner, for the cover designs and photo, Bryant Cardwell and for rendering the maps, Ashley Cardwell. My apologies to anyone to whom I am endebted, but who I neglected to mention.

Finally, I thank Joan, my wife, who eased my way into computer usage, provided understanding and solace when memories overwhelmed me, detected innumerable typos and generaly smoothed the transition from idea to typescript.

PART ONE

Prologue

In spite of loss and heartbreak, I have have been extremely lucky in life. I was in good luck, which is chance that turns out well, the hour I was born. No child could have been born to a more loving and caring set of parents, grandparents, or a clan of aunts, uncles and cousins of various degrees than I was. I was lucky that, once I had to leave the home of my parents to escape to Switzerland, I was welcomed by relatives and into two successive families of strangers who soon seemed like family. My good luck continued by having had some outstanding teachers, whom I still revere and thank, the kind who inspire, are fair, tough, and kind.

The final stroke of luck, a conjunction of fate and choice, considering the myriad of other possibilities, was and is my marriage to and life with Joan Lindskold, a vision of enchantment on that New Year's Eve date in 1951. That was far into the future on 16 October 1928, the day I was born as Werner Liebschütz, in Munich, Germany.

I was born by cesarean section. My mother, then in her mid-twenties, could not nurse me and, having been born before the age of baby formulas, I suckled at the breasts of a wet-nurse. Other than my mother's breast milk, I lacked nothing - love, care, clothing, a fancy baby carriage with big wheels. I always was smiling in the dozens of snapshots my mother took with her Voigtlander bellows camera. I could have been the prototype for Charlie Brown, the roundheaded kid, a smile between big cheeks, surrounded by a nearly hairless circle. I must have been a happy baby.

"Must have been" because I never had a chance to ask my parents. Germans killed them during the Holocaust, but that, too, was in the future. I know how I looked and how my parents looked at that time, and later, only because non-Jewish friends of my parents and their relatives had the courage to receive, hide and safekeep hundreds of photos of our family until after the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945. These good, ordinary people were undaunted by the cowards and informers among whom they lived. Among these people of principle were the Rasigs in Munich. Their daughter, Rosemarie Müller, sent me many of the pictures in 1985 after she obtained my address from Werner Trapp, a boyhood friend of mine, who, in turn, had received it from a friend of my Aunt Erna. The courage of the Rasigs, and of a few others like them, has allowed me to stitch together a picture of my childhood and helped arrange the hazy fragments I remembered into a reasonably focused whole.

In the nest

Introductions

I have a story to tell, a story with many facets. The characters in my story are not fictions, they are real; they are my town, my family, my relatives, friends and one-time strangers. None of them are necessarily fascinating or odd. They are people like millions of others who mind their lives and strive to do well within their capabilities and to do good as a matter of course. My characters are tied together by blood, chance and fate. They were caught in the once unimaginable terror that became known as the Holocaust. Some managed to escape; some perished. Those who were killed by Nazi Germany were among millions who were worked, shot or gassed to death. But, among these millions, they remained individuals to me, the men and women of my family. They were my parents, my relatives. They shaped my life in their life and influenced it even after their deaths. Those who escaped or never were in danger also helped mold my life. To tell of my life as a child and youth, I must introduce my family and my town as they were, or, at least, as I remember them. They are important to me and I hope that you are inclined to meet them, to get to know them, to appreciate and, if you wish, to judge them, and, by extension, me.

My town

My Mindelheim, my town, has disappeared. The country town that was my playground and that of my friends has vanished; it was swept aside by time, nearly seven decades worth. Sure, Mindelheim stills grows where the Romans planted it two millenia ago, in Swabia, a region of Bavaria. It still is about 90 kilometer west of the metropolis Munich and not far, just 20 train minutes, from Memmingen, the nearest real city. Mindelheim is much larger and prettier now, with its old fancied-up pastel-colored buildings lining both sides of the Maximilianstrasse, the main street, the artery of the city now and when I was a kid.

When I was a kid, the town housed about 6000 people and most of the buildings looked as old as they were, at least a century old. They were dull, dirty-concrete gray to grayish tan. Not pretty. But, they were in my town, a grand playground where we boys could stray and never get lost, where everyone seemed to know us, for better or for worse. It was my haven and that of my family until the Nazis destroyed hope, aspirations, dreams, and, eventually, the lives of my family, except mine.

It's in Mindelheim, within its medieval city walls and just outside them, where the memories of my early years are rooted, where my story begins.

I see the city wall anchored by the Obere Tor (Upper Gateway) to the left of where we lived and by the Untere Tor down the Maximilianstrasse on the right. The broad legs of these towers are splayed to form short tunnels, the gates to the city, just wide enough to allow two horse-drawn wagons or cars to pass by each other. The Obere Tor was topped by slatted enclosures that hid wake-up-the-dead bells. Once, in first or second grade, our class was allowed to scramble up the steep, narrow wooden stairs, the thick treads concave near their edge from centuries of wear, to come face to face with the bells, three or four of them, huge and small, the littlest one about the size of a large cow bell. Their rims were encircled by raised garlands and the strikes were uneven and elongated, rather than smooth and spherical, as I had expected. Ropes as thick as our boy's wrists looped through the eye on top of each bell and then dropped down to a landing where the sexton was waiting to ring the hour. When our teacher, Herr Weiss, saw this monk topped by, to me, a funny hair cut, and wrapped in a brown cloth tied in the middle by a rope, he hurried us to a lower landing and told us to shut our ears with the palms of our hands before the large hour bell was rung, else our ear drums might have split. Even with my hands pressed against my ears, the deep-throated clang of the bell penetrated my skull, my whole body.

We lived half way between the two towers, in a non-descript building faced with dirty-gray stucco-like plaster. The three-story building was plain, but it stood and still stands on the best spot in town, right on the Marktplatz, the center of action. The *Rathaus*, city hall, a seventeenth century creation, contrasted with its plain neighbors. The wine-red stucco hulk, trimmed with grey stone window frames and plaster emblems, fronts on the Marktplatz and on Maximilianstrasse. A bronze Ritter (knight) Frundsberg, the medieval protector of Mindelheim, in full armor, his right hand on the grip of his sword, stands on a corner pedestal about ten feet above the sidewalk. From this lofty perch, he looked down on the passing citizenry, including my family and friends .

Before we moved into the heart of Mindelheim, we lived on the second floor of an apartment complex beyond the city wall. The buildings in my snapshot look plain, like government issue, set among lawns. With the ground covered with snow and I just weeks old, my mother recorded the scene while I was napping in the fresh air. I was covered with white blankets, had a white woolen cap on my head and was tucked into a voile-fringed buggy. It was my initiation into a strict family principle and practice - to stay as healthy as possible, people, especially children, need fresh air every day. That early exposure to the out-of doors must have conditioned me to work, walk or ride my bike out in the open air every day, whether Fresno heat shocks in July or white-out fog chills in January.

Once I grew beyond the buggy age, I was allowed to play in the sand box of the play ground. My mother carefully watched over me so my clothes and I would stay unsoiled. That was before the age of play clothes and automatic washing machines; besides, my mother was very fastidious. I happily played, covered with an apron that protected my clothes from neck to knees, with a pocket in front and tied in back. Once, when I was about two or so, my mother let me outside even though I was dressed in a navy- blue sailor suit with white stripes about the neck line and around the sleeves. She obviously made me wait too long; by the time she finally came back, just minutes later, I was covered with sand from head to toe. Both my ears then quickly rung and the right one hurt; tears streaked the sand on my cheeks and home we stayed, inside.

The intensely fragrant Limburger still lingers in my memory. A very nice still childless couple who lived on the ground floor liked me to come and visit them. Once, the husband happened to be drinking beer and eating Limburger cheese on rye bread; he offered me some, cheese on rye, that is. I liked it and downed quite hunk of it. A half hour later, my mother flared with indignation at the stink I exuded when I stepped into our apartment. How could these nice people let little tender me stuff myself with this reeking adult food? I have liked Limburger ever since, but Limburger is hard to find in California.

When I was about five, in 1933, we moved in with my grandmother and Aunt Erna to the flat on the Marktplatz, close to our store. It was here where I started my life as a boy, a real boy, protected, disciplined, encouraged, occasionally spoiled, and, above all, loved by my parents, my grandmother and Aunt Erna.

My family

My mother, Fanni Liebschütz, née Bach, though less than five feet tall, with a big shock of curly black hair combed to the right and parted on the left, was not a shrinking personality. She had been toughened when still a child. Her mother, a victim of tuberculosis, died when she was just three and her sister, my Aunt Lilian, was only one year old. Their father soon married again and fathered the girls' half-sister, Margot. The birth of this intruder relegated my mother and my aunt to second-class membership in the family. Margot's mother filled the legendary role assigned to stepmothers in fairy tales, unfair and overbearing. Her Margot was the prettiest and favorite; the two older ones were tolerated. As I look at a picture of my mother at about eleven and of her five-year old half-sister, the younger one is decked out in a dark velvet dress adorned with a velvet belt, a big white bow on each shoulder; neat braids frame her pretty face. My mother's outfit has the aura of a second-hand store. She is in a pleated, checked skirt topped by a plain long blouse cinched at the waist, a semi-pleated band below the cinch; a V-shaped collarless opening surrounds her neck. Below her ample, frizzy and unordered hair, a thin-lipped half smile looks at me. That picture foreshadows the strains I noticed in the family fabric as I became aware of an undercurrent of animosity among some of the adults. The bias that divided the children into two camps culminated in my grandfather's will in which he favored the half-sister by a factor of two. The denigration of my mother and my aunt led their half-sister, who married an American and moved with him to the United States, to fatally cut family ties. The two, though living comfortably, did nothing to help either of her kin flee Nazi Germany. My parents never escaped and Aunt Lilian and her husband were vouched for and saved by distant relatives and total strangers, kindnesses that opened the doors to America for them.

My mother's face seemed to discover relaxed smiles only after she had met my father and they widened with motherly pride and pleasure when she was holding her days-old baby, me. Her smile was the same in the last picture I have of my parents, taken in May 1940, where she embraces my father from behind as he sits on a bench in a forest, undoubtedly during a Spaziergang, the traditional leisurely Sunday walk.

Decades later, I discovered two faded photos, identified only with "Wallerstein" written on their backs, among the hundreds of old ones entrusted to family friends before nazi Germany shipped my parents to their deaths. In one, about two dozen young women and girls, none smiling, most in dark dresses with white collars, and one nun in a black and white confining habit, are bunched together; some stand, some sit. I scanned the photo row by row until I found a girl who I thought might be my mother. In the other one, about the same number of women and girls, and two nuns stand or sit on the grass of a meadow, shaded by a large tree. Here that girl sits in the front row. Still, what was Wallerstein and was that really my mother at the age of about ten? My nonagenarian aunt, my mother's sister, solved the puzzle.

Yes, this particular serious-looking girl was my mother at Wallerstein, a girls' boarding school. Before landing at Wallerstein, my mother had attended a staid private school for girls in Munich where she indulged in playing tricks and pranks rather than in serious study. The breaches of decorum weren't serious, according to Aunt Lillian, but too disconcerting for the stuffy school. So, with little ado, the school's master kicked out that perky girl, my mother, who then landed under the watchful eyes of nuns with their 24 hours-a-day strict discipline. No wonder she looks sour in those pictures. That my mother had that sort of spunk and sense of humor, after growing up in a home with little to smile about, delights me; she had some fun as a girl. But, school never captured her interest; she became a high school drop-out.

My mother probably babied me when I still was in diapers, but she grew strict with me as my individuality developed. She never gave me a classic spanking, one that would leave a lasting impression. She had her own punishing habit - pulling my ears and the short hair just above them for what I considered minor offenses. The yanks felt like a thousand pricks and annoyed the hell out of me, but the memory usually wore off quickly. I much rather suffered the broad-based attack on my rear that my father delivered when deserved.

My mother was excitable and tended to worry. What would I do next? "Watch out for cars and wagons!", although there was little traffic of any kind in my Mindelheim. "Chew your food well! Put on your coat! Don't run down the stairs! Don't slide down the bannister!" All these daily admonitions! They were a nuisance. They were her domain, because she was around me more than was my father. But, when she and I walked in the countryside or hiked in the mountains, she was calm, energetic, reassuring and fun to be with. She was a credible skier and swimmer, although sports were not as high on her agenda as on my father's. She enjoyed reading stories to me. During daytime, at home or on the grass in the country, they were the tales of the Grimm brothers or their frightening cousins, like the *Rattenfænger von Hameln* (The Pied Piper of Hamlin), *Rotkæppchen* (Little Red Ridinghood) or my favorite, *Hænsel und Gretel*. These stories scared and enchanted me. They were my formal entertainment, except for spell cast by Shirley Temple. I saw her only twice, may be three times, larger than life and in black and white, in the only and dinky movie house in Mindelheim. She stole my heart. How wonderful that she was about my age! I would marry her some day.

These Shirley Temple movies were the only ones I ever was allowed to see during the eleven years I lived at home. During the school year, homework had to be done and when that was finished, fresh air and outside fun beckoned. In summer, my parents declared it sinful to be spellbound inside, in darkness, when the sun brightened the world.

At bedtime, my mother regaled me with biblical tales, not because we were particularly religious, but because they always embedded a moral I needed to absorb; besides, I lapped them up. I never could get enough of Joseph and his dastardly brothers who sold him into slavery or of Jacob and the angel. My mother also taught me some now forgotten prayers for bedtime and insisted that I recite them once they were stuck in my brain. At least they were short. I have no idea whether my mother believed in the efficacy of prayers to a listening God, as insurance in case there was a God who would respond, or in their beneficial effect on those who prayed.

My father, athletically built, no more than five foot seven, urged me on physically and expected diligence in school no less than my mother did. Sports were his passion, as amateur participant, not as lazy enthusiast on the sidelines or in the stands. He skied and taught me to ski; he swam and taught me to swim; he played soccer and taught me to play soccer; he hiked, weather or no, and he infected me with his enthusiasm for the outdoors; he excelled on the parallel bars; he water skied before there were modern water skis. I never learned to water ski and, in the other sports, I never reached his level of excellence, but I absorbed from him the love of and need for physical excercise, to test what I could do. He was and has continued to be the hero of my life, my guide and inspiration.

Scholar he was not, just like my mother. When quizzed about his tardy graduation from high school, he explained that his teacher liked him so well that he kept him an extra year. No wonder he insisted that I study and strive.

I never paid attention to, much less judged my father's looks. What child would? He simply was my father, loving, strict, inspiring. Now, as I look at him in photos from his young manhood until the last one, from 1940, I can see why even strangers consider him to have had the virile good looks of Clark Gable.

In a portrait of spring 1896, as a three-year old, he stands next to his older sister, Berta, in a sailor dress, yes dress, not suit. He wears a beret that only partly hides his artfully layered black curls, one tuft pointing right, the other one left. He wears the diffident expression of a kid who knew that the occasion was important and that he looked cute, but who was not thrilled to be stuck in that dress while holding still for the photographer to be recorded on a glass plate.

I next see my father in a German soldier's dress uniform during an early year of World War I. He is all spit and polish, stands at ease, ramrod straight, with his right, white-gloved hand resting on the belt buckle and the relaxed left holding his soldier's cap. He already sported the neatly trimmed mustache he wore the rest of his too short life. His curls are disciplined into four parallel rows, with a part in the middle. His expression is one of quiet self-confidence. A little more than 20 years later, my father still had an easy, handsome smile in spite of the tribulations of the times, and was well-dressed, as always, as he relaxes in the woods, sitting on the ground, with my mother and family friends.

My father pushed the world aside before I could do it myself. I felt secure, protected. Once I was in the world without him, I still felt his presence. His invisible hand guided me when I was alone among strangers.

At the time of their deaths, victims of Nazi Germany's Final Solution for us Jews, my mother was younger than forty, my father not yet fifty. Long dead, they have remained young.

My father's mother was the only grandmother in my life. My mother's mother had died long before I was born and her stepmother was no substitute.

Grandmother stood taller than my mother though slightly hunched, had gray hair, habitually wore a black grosgrain ribbon around her neck, and always dressed in gray or black. A cloche hat, like a medieval lady's cap, imprisoned her head whenever she left the house. Even as a handsome, refined-looking young women of 21 with slightly untamed curly hair, she dressed severely. Her blouse is the same dark shade as her jacket; a wide dark band wraps around her neck, anchored near the bottom center by a large filigreed broche. She smiles in none of the pictures I have of her; in only one photo does she wear a slightly bemused expression. May be that is why I did not feel cozy with her; she seemed remote. She also was quite strict with me, a trait common to the whole family, except for Aunt Erna, one of her four daughters.

Occasionally, pointed arguments coursed through the family and they mostly flared between my grandmother and my mother. I suppose they reflected self-generating conflicts that arise when several generations live together, when mother and daughter-in-law do not see the same world. Then, my father, caught between mother and spouse, had to calm and reconcile the ladies in his life.

I wish I knew more about my grandmother, what kept her face unsmiling, what inspired the disagreements between her and my mother, and all the details that transform a picture into a person. That was not to be. The hollowing out of family memory, the fountain that refreshes, surprises and inspires each generation, is one of the prices exacted by Nazi Germany's execution of two, and even three, generations of Jewish families. It makes the memories I do have all the more precious.

My grandfather Samuel, Mina's husband, died at 70, in 1930, when I was just two. He was a handsome man. His broad forehead, kind eyes shaded by white brows, white mustache, white goatee and impeccably combed white hair lent him a look of distinction.

My father likely inherited his flair for careful dress and fastidious appearance from my grandfather, his father. Looking out from a sepia-toned oval set in a square he does honor to a young fashion merchant. He probably was in his middle twenties, about the time he married my grandmother. Each hair in his wavy crown is in place, parted to the left of center. Determined eyes look to the left and a whisp of a mustache foreshadows the full beard he carried in a photo from his thirties. From his starched-stiff flared collar emerges a patterned tie shaped as an inverted V. His high-buttoned double-breasted jacket allows for just a small patch of a white shirt to show. His attire is that of a gentleman, not of a dandy.

My grandfather celebrated his 70th birthday in apparent good health, judging by the vigorous-looking man standing beside the banquet table set in his honor. No one had expected him to die within a few months of that celebration. As I was only a toddler at that time, I know my grandfather only from snapshots, most likely taken by my mother. Inexplicably, these photos bring me closer to him than I feel to my grandmother with whom we, my parents and I, lived for six years. In one snapshot, I am sitting on a bench in the sun, between my father and his father, at the municipal swimming pool. My grandfather wears swim trunks, my father a knit swim suit with the left shoulder exposed, likely to improve on his tan. I am in a swim suit with alternating diagonal light and dark waves interrupted by a stylized dog over my navel. Three generations basking in the warmth of summer and togetherness.

No one could have been kinder, more self-effacing or selfless than Aunt Erna, the aunt universal. Like all the young Liebschütz sisters, she was attractive; her oval face and gentle smile were bordered by brown hair simply parted in the middle. She never was one to fuss over herself, but she always was as well dressed as her circumstances permitted without jeopardizing her budget.

Aunt Erna was single for almost all of her 89 years. She was married only a year or so, starting in 1933 or 1934, after which the husband, Solly Landsberg, a sour-looking, pinch-faced man, reminiscent of the senior Rockefeller, was dismissed from the family. He had married Aunt Erna in the expectation that our family would rescue the failing business of his father. The only visible residues of the marriage were the name Landsberg, Mrs. Landsberg, Landsy to her friends, and two or three family pictures in which her evanescent husband appears more shadow than substance. I have a faint recollection that there was some sort of ruckus in the family about the time we had moved in with Aunt Erna and my now widowed grandmother. It definitely was not a wedding celebration. Why did she ever marry that shadow? As Aunt Lillian remembers it, she met him through a personal advertisement in a Jewish newspaper. At that time, and even more recently, having a single daughter in her thirties was cause for concern for the family, even if not for the daughter.

Was it that brief alliance that soured Aunt Erna on marriage, or did she simply prefer to remain single? Over the years, family, friends and plain aquaintances tried to play Shadchen, marriage broker, trying to fix her up with this or that eligible-seeming bachelor, first in Germany and later in the United States. She vehemently was not interested. "Lass mich allein!" .- Leave me alone! Family lore has it that her ideal of a man was my Uncle Alfred, the husband of her sister Helene; but since he was taken, that was that. There is no question that Aunt Erna's resistance to men benefitted the rest of the family during her long life. How else could she have showered everyone with love, attention and gifts on her relatively modest income? She had the knack of invariably chosing exactly the right gift, in the right color and size, if clothing. She did it for adults as for children, although she never had any of her own. Her nephews and, later, her grandnephews and grandnieces were her children. She spoiled them, including me, as no parent would or should.

When I was sent to bed without dessert for some infraction of family rules, not a rare event, she would sneak me a piece of cake, cookies, or pudding as solace. I never had to cry about or beg for it, she and the dessert just quietly appeared at my bedside. The charitable deed done, she was perfectly willing to refute the mild scolding she received for her soft-heartedness with a shrug, a smile and: "He is just a child."

Aunt Erna was genuinely bothered when she received gifts; she was not deserving of such largesse, even when its value was minor. It was she who gave gifts; it was not for her to receive. Similarly, at the dinner table, she always asked for a small piece of meat; the more desirable something to any one else, the less she wanted. This excessive modesty often led to excitable back and forth at the table: "Take more!" "No." Another slice of meat, propelled by my father, would land on her plate. "I just won't eat it." Back and forth until one side or the other gave up. Later in life, in Detroit, she even developed a protein deficiency because of her eating habits, in spite of the determined efforts of her sister and brother-in-law, with whom she lived, to have her eat properly. On doctor's orders, she finally started eating a reasonable amount of meat.

Only desserts nudged aside her modesty. She cherished sweets - cakes, cookies, pies, chocolates. But, even with these *Leckereien*, tidbits, she did not overindulge, she just rationalized: Since she did not take sugar in her tea, she could have two pieces of cake or a piece of cake and then a chocolate candy to seal the meal.

Aunt Erna not only liked to eat desserts, but conjured up masterful cakes, torten, and cookies of all kinds. My mouth starts watering when I think of her rum-enhanced chocolate cake squares: a layer of rummy cake, a smear of strawberry jam, another layer of cake and a sprinkle of powdered sugar for decoration. Sinfully rich, heavenly morsels, cubes just right to fit into the mouth where they dissolved into sensuousness.

Aunt Erna's death, foreshadowed by long illness, shook me more than I had expected. She was the last of my parents' generation who had feathered my nest in Mindelheim with love and care.

Our stores

My grandparents moved from Munich to Mindelheim in the late 1800s where they opened a dry goods store where they offered women's and children's wear, fabrics and notions. Right from the start, Samuel and Mina Liebschütz realized that farmers and their wives had little time to spend on shopping for clothes and fabrics. Besides, travel by horse- and-buggy was slow; there were no cars. So, my grandfather steered a horse-drawn buggy along country lanes to neighboring villages and hamlets to offer his wares. My grandparents satisfied their customers; they did not become rich, but they were solid and respected Mindelheim middle class by the time I was born. They had founded the only Jewish family in Mindelheim.

My grandfather named his store after himself, S. Liebschütz. The first one he and my grandmother opened adjoined the ancient city wall, near the Obere Tor. In a photo dating to World War I, my father stands left of center in a simple soldier's uniform. To his left rest neatly stacked bolts of fabric, offered in large squares, small squares, stripes, solids. My grandfather, in dark suit, vest, white shirt and four-in-hand tie, takes the middle, and across the isle stands Aunt Berta, the oldest of the Liebschütz offspring, in dark skirt and patterned blouse. All three stand like wooden soldiers, stiff and without a trace of smile, undoubtedly trying not to move while their image was recorded.

Our second, larger store, we could see from our flat; it was just across the Marktplatz, on Maximilianstrasse, the main street. The tops of the display windows are decorated with swag curtains in a photo from about 1930. The window to the left of the lace-curtained door displays white-collared ladies' dresses; in the one to the right sits a boy mannequin in a sailor suit with long sleeves and short pants; it could have been I in my dress "uniform". "Bleyle" touted signs, one mounted high, perpendicular to the wall, the other one low. Bleyle knitwear was as prestigious then as it is today.

"My" store, the third and largest one, where I sometimes hung out when nothing better beckoned or where I might report after school or play, stood half-way between our home and the Obere Tor, on "our" side of the Maximilianstrasse. My grandmother and Aunt Erna waited on customers and my mother was the bookkeeper, an irony, because her father had fired her for messing up his financial records years earlier. Aunt Berta was married by then and lived in Munich. My father, being a dutiful son, worked for, but not in the store. He visited farmers and villagers in the countryside surrounding Mindelheim, just as his father had done.

Instead of guiding horses pulling a buggy, he steered a black Opel, the Chevrolet of Germany.

I eagerly accompanied my father on his country routes when he would let me join him, which wasn't nearly as often as I would have liked. His customers, seamstresses, farm wives and their daughters, welcomed him and spoiled me with cookies, cake or some other treat while they decided which ladies' and children's clothes or fabrics they craved enough to buy. Among all the pleasures of the road, the highlight was having *Mittagessen*, the big mid-day meal, in a restaurant. Sitting there in public, among men, with my father next to me and hearty country cooking in front of me, what a thrill! I simultaneously felt little and big, little, because I was, and big because I was allowed to sit just among men. Country women stayed home.

My father, my mother, my grandmother and Aunt Erna were my family, my extended family, right where they and I lived in Mindelheim, in our large flat on the Marktplatz and where they worked in our store, not five minutes from home even on slow legs. We in Mindelheim were just a smidgen of our grand family. With my grandmother Mina, neé Seligman, mother of five, having been one of nine children and my mother's father, Isidor Bach, having been one of seven, we had relatives scattered all over Bavaria and beyond.

On branches of the family tree

Some of our relatives looked down on Mindelheim as a hick town, where nothing changed - not people, not minds, not town. Likely true, but it was these hick attitutes that made Mindelheim such a fun place for us boys, my friends and me. We could be all over the place; dangers we faced were minor and mainly those we made ourselves. It was a cozy nest. Only Memmingen came close.

Memmingen, about twice the size of Mindelheim and less than a half hour by train from home, was the town of the Heilbronners, Aunt Helene, six years younger than my father, self-confident and attractive to beautiful, Uncle Alfred, her husband, and Walter and Hans, their sons, my cousins. With them lived Uncle Alfred's father, David, making it a three-generation household, just like ours in Mindelheim.

Also just like we, they lived in a second-story flat; unlike we, they lived directly by the medieval city wall, on the old-city side. This vine- and moss-covered defense bordered one side of their courtyard. A dilapidated stairway led to a red tile-covered walkway from which we, my cousins and I, peered through slits in the wall to the newer city beyond and shot make-believe arrows at imaginary invaders.

Onkel-Alfred-und-Tante-Helene (Helen once in the United States); they were one entity, one focus, one expression. Even after Uncle Alfred had died, many years later, I had to consciously think "Aunt Helen" when thinking or talking about her. They were inseparable in my mind and in fact, devoted to each other. Both were strong personalities, with Uncle Alfred the more imposing. He was taller than my father, balded early, had a tenor's chest, had inherited the Heilbronner nose from his father and passed it on down the generations. Shape, not size, distinguished it; it was relatively broad on top and more steeply pitched than average; it still defines the Heilbronner look. His stance was that of an officer, which he had been in the Kaiser's army, erect, chest out, confident. He inspired confidence, was strict, understood children and enjoyed them, just like my father. Among all my relatives he was the wittiest. He had a bottomless reservoir of apt, funny sayings, some of them remembered Schmonzes from the Yiddish, many his own coinage. He delivered them with the expert timing and intonation of a stand-up comic. With authority in his voice, he counseled Walter, Hans and me, when we were old enough to appreciate his wisdom: *"Lobe das Mædchen nicht vor dem Morgen"*. - Do not praise the girl before daybreak, which was his variation of "Do not praise the day before nightfall."

One lost summer around 1950, when Aunt Erna ran a hotel in Charlevoix, a resort town in northern Michigan, Hans and I were recruited to assist her at the old pile of a guest house in pampering the clients and minding the building and grounds. Not a bed was empty, most occupied by paying friends of the family and their friends. Most spoke German and most were no longer young, except one couple. The time was past nine; Hans and I had finished our last chores of the long day. All of us, including Uncle Alfred and Aunt Helen, were sitting around the lounge, talking and laughing; just Aunt Erna was missing, she still was in the kitchen. The young couple, the wife visibly pregnant, excused themselves; they were tired. Good nights all around, and the talk continued. No more than a quarter hour later, our conversation slowed, stopped; everyone listened to a rythmic sound from above. What was it? Uncle Alfred, in a clarion stage whisper: *"Wisst Ihr nicht was das ist? Es ist das Bett. Er reitet dem Erben entgegen."* - You don't know? It's the bed; he is riding to meet his heir. A burst of laughter; silence above.

No, most of Uncle Alfred's witticisms did not relate to sex; they just happen to be the ones that lodged in my memory.

Next to my father, Uncle Alfred was the man who I tried to emulate most and who I did not want to disappoint in any way. One time I did, severely.

Uncle Alfred was in Mindelheim, closeted with my father in the office of
our store. I had no doubt that I should know whatever it was they discussed. If it was a secret, it obviously would be of interest to me, a nosy eight or nine year old. If it wasn't a secret, why would they have closed the door? I sneak up to the door, crouch, my ear at the door, but all I hear is the hum of two male voices alternating.

Suddenly, the door tears open and Uncle Alfred looms above me, glowering, face red. I froze; blood rushed to my head; my rear tightened for the expected licking. No spanking, just a dressing down that rang in my ears for years to come. The stinging admonition still reverberates: *"Der Hœhrer an der Wand hœhrt nur seine eigne Schand!"*. - The listener at the wall hears nothing but his own shame. How ashamed I was, indeed! I had disappointed, yes, offended, Uncle Alfred. My father's castigation hurt less; children expect to occasionally disappoint their parents, but my favorite uncle, that was something else.

Uncle Alfred sold fabrics for men's suits to tailors in and around Memmingen, sometimes travelling, just as did my father, and was successful at it. The Heilbronners seemed more prosperous to me than we were, even a touch elegant. *Alfred M. Heilbronner Grosstuchhandlung* (wholesale fabrics) was near the railroad station and was one of my favorite destinations, not because I was interested in the hundreds of dull-colored bolts of fabric - tan, gray, brown and black - stripes on some, herringbone on others, but because Uncle Alfred was there and because the bustling at the station and watching trains come, stop, then go, let my imagination roam to far places I had heard about, Italy, France, Switzerland. Besides, I could go there by myself when my cousins had better things to do. Also in the store was Fræulein Anna Mayr, Uncle Alfred's secretary-bookkeeper. She resembled Aunt Erna: single, kind, loving and spoiling kids. She also was fiercely loyal, so much so that the Nazi pressures on Jews, particularly in Jew-baiting Memmingen, caused her to lapse into serious mental depression. She eventually recovered and long outlived the Nazi years, as if in spite. She died at her home, an old, honorable and honored lady.

No one is perfect, not even Uncle Alfred. He and his breakfasts annoyed me whenever I was allowed to stay overnight in Memmingen. He categorically refused to let me, or my cousins, have any of the delicacies arrayed in front of him. It was not the fragrant kaiser rolls, from which he pulled and discarded the slightly sticky center, a waste in my youthful and silent opinion, but those delicious-looking and enticingly aromatic fresh cold cuts, I envied him and wanted. "They are not for children". I didn't see why not, but did not dare ask. Questioning adults, including parents or relatives, simply was, if not unthinkable, at least inadvisable. Why did I have to be satsified with jams on my bread or roll, delicious as they were, when he could indulge in these luxuries? The fact that Aunt Helene, for whatever reason, abstained from lunch meats at breakfast was no consolation. The fact that we, in our family, never served cold cuts for breakfast made them all the more tempting and my exclusion the harder to swallow.

Aunt Helene ran the household and my cousins, and me, when I was visiting. She was strict, but gave us plenty of leeway to be boys. What drove her nuts was the sibling rivalry between Walter and Hans, a rivalry that often escalated into fights. I was just a bystander, slightly scared and totally fascinated. Scared, because I accidentally might get hit with a flying slipper or shoe; fascinated because, having no sibs, I had to learn about brotherly love and fights from Walter and Hans. When I was still illiterate, Walter read stories to me, like a caring older brother. My favorite was Wilhelm Busch's *"Max und Moritz"*, enticing tales in rhyme of two immortal tricksters of whose illustrated rascalities I never tired, verses my mother never would have read to me. Ah, if only I could be as clever and daring as these two daredevils! Walter entertained me, but instead of pure praise, it earned him the reprimand "Why can't you be as nice to your brother as you are to little Werner?" Sometimes, it's hard to win.

Aunt Helene was a superb cook and baker. At her table, we ate even better than we did at home, but the only end result of her artistry that sticks in my mind is the Berches, Challa, the bread that is blessed on the eve of the Sabbath, on Friday nights. Its aroma is irresistible; its intertwined strands, baked to a perfect brownish tan, glistening from having been brushed with beaten egg yolk and dotted with poppy seed, enhance the irresistibility. But, for now, the Berches rests under a satin cloth inscribed in Hebrew stichery with the brocha, the blessing, over bread. Now, Aunt Helene lights two white candles and recites the Shabbos blessing over them. A moment of silence; then, Uncle Alfred intones the brocha, blessedly brief, slices the Berches, and hands each one of us at the table a piece. Everyone sprinkles a bit of salt on the bread. To enhance the flavor? To symbolize the salt of the earth? The Heilbronners were a little more observant than we, and their Shabbos dinners were more festive than ours. But, just like at home, *eingemachtes Huhn* was the traditional Friday night dinner. The tender chicken was smothered in a rich and ever so smooth white sauce that emanated the goodness of a perfectly cooked chicken. In a way, the chicken seemed incidental; it simply was the source of the heavenly sauce that penetrated every pore of the pieces of Berches on my plate, ready to be speared with the fork. Then, when the morsel is in the mouth, the tongue pushes against the palate and squeezes out the sauce so it coats every flavor sensor and sends the enticing aroma to the brain. No wonder, Friday night was considered holy.

Aunt Helene also had to manage Uncle Alfred's father, her father-in-law, a retired cattle dealer. He was a kind old gentlemen, hard of hearing. I can see and hear him in the morning shuffling along in his felt slippers. He seemed ancient to me even though he was only in his seventies, a round wrinkled face with smiling eyes looking at us through his pince nez. He was my adopted grandfather, since I saw him frequently; my father's father had died when I was only two and my mother's father not only lived further away, in Munich, but had died when I was seven.

The Heilbronners lived a German middle class life, just like we - being Germans in daily life, working, enjoying themselves, taking for granted that Germany, the country for which Uncle Alfred and my father had fought in World War I, was their country as much as any other German's. They and we were Germans who happened to be Jews.

The annual Memmingen carnival was a magnet for the three of us, brothers and cousins. Aunt Helene handed us a some Pfennig for a sweet treat and enough for a ticket to a tent show. We hurried to the fair grounds and wandered among stalls and tents with barkers touting all sorts of tempting adventures. Walter chose the hypnotist and Hans and I willingly followed, I in ignorance, because I had no clue what a hypnotist does. Ten Pfennig each got us into the dimly lighted space under the canvas. We sat down on folding chairs and I eagerly awaited the mysteries of hypnosis. Finally, the magician, at least that what he resembled in his black tuxedo, white starched shirt and black bow tie, strode on to the stage, propelled by a drum roll, greeted us, the other kids and a sprinkling of adults, with a deep bow and asked for volunteers to be put under his spell. I sat fascinated and scared as adult town innocents lost themselves on that stage and obeyed the hypnotist's mesmerizing commands to stand, walk, crawl, beg like a dog, to make fools of themselves. Never, ever, would I let anyone do that to me! It sure had been enlightening and definitely worth our ten Pfennig.

Excessive self control was not one of Walter's virtues. His fuse was short. One time, Aunt Helene sent him to the little grocery store on the street level of their building. The couple who owned this crammed mini- emporium was generous and often gave us kids a candy or two when we came to buy some sugar, flour, a bar of soap or whatever Aunt Helene needed. This time, no candy. Walter lit up, went outside, grabbed a handful of dirt from nearby and threw it into the store before he ran upstairs, home. The news travelled fast and Uncle Alfred's large hand had no trouble finding its target.

Escapades like this solidified Walter's reputation as the instigator of trouble. Hans never would do this or that; he never started fights; he always was even-tempered. That was a family fiction, not even close to reality, Walter maintained. It always was he who was stuck with the blame, even when he supposedly was innocent of whatever started the ruckus. Both boys played their roles well, even if unawares, and this perception, well founded or not, fed a sibling rivalry that lingered into their mature years. I, the youngest one, just stood aside and enjoyed the incidental entertainment my cousins provided.

One New Year's Eve, at our home, I was allowed to stay up late, maybe until ten. All the Heilbronners, except Grandfather David, were at our flat. The amusement of the evening was *Bleigiessen*, pouring of lead. The game must have been a common diversion, because we had a little burner stand, like those used to warm snifting brandy on cold winter nights, with a little fat-bellied pot set on top. Each player, one at a time, dropped a piece of lead into the pot, let it melt, took the pot by the handle, and then dumped the ball of liquid metal into a bowl of cold water. A big hiss, a puff of steam, and, presto, the lead had solidified into a shape that fired the imagination. What was it? What did it portend, this three-dimensional Rorschach test? I saw stars, clouds, animals, all of no portent. "No, it's this not, that; don't you see what I see?" Sprightly arguments with no winners and no losers.

After a while, we boys were sent into the otherwise forbidden formal dining room to entertain ouselves some other ways. Now, just the adults played the game. What could be THAT funny to account for the peals of laughter from the other side of the door? I now bet that the adults saw in those random shapes of lead objects I couldn't even imagine then.

Then, just before lights out for us boys, everyone got a a gift, a gag to usher in the New Year. My mother had chosen and wrapped each one and each one brought laughter, except one. Walter got the biggest box, big enough for a soccer ball, at least. He opened it. Hmm. In it was another box, its string tied just as carefully, as the one around the biggest box. "*Was geht's*?". - What's going on? Walter asked as he untied the string of Box 2, about half the size if Box 1. And, in Box 2 was Box 3, just as neatly closed and half the size of Box 2. Finally, in Box 3 was Box 4. Walter's patience was running thin and no one, except my mother, knew what to expect. Silence. Bulging eyes. Walter untied the string. He lifted the lid. He and we saw a wad of cotton, a white wad of medical cotton. Walter tore at the wad. "Verdammt!" His cheeks glowed fiery red; he hurled his prize across the room and ran out the door. His booty was a plain rectangular rubber eraser, just like those we took to school. The fun congealed.

My mother just had wanted to kid Walter about his less than sterling performance at school. The joke was flat. My mother had gone too far. She cried and sought out Walter. She apologized to him. He came back in, now calm, with a faint smile.

Time for cakes and coffee, for tea and hot cocoa. All was forgiven. Our stomachs satisfyingly plump, we boys headed for bed.

It also was in Mindelheim when both of them, Walter and Hans, let me down, me, their little cousin. A parade was in the offing and a pile of bleacher racks and planks was stacked on the Marktplatz, between our house and the Marienbrunnen, the fountain dedicated to the Holy Mary. We three and some other boys were climbing and jumping around on the stack, playing tag, having a ball. Being small and not overly brave, I was not one to pick fights; but, with my big and strong cousins to protect me, out of nowhere and for no reason, I challenged the other boys with some epithets and bragged: "If you do something to me, my cousins will get you!" Their

"Oh, yea? You get yourself into trouble, you get yourself out of it!" quickly deflated me. I retreated, red-faced and disappointed that I couldn't be brash even once. Another lesson of life.

Some other time, Walter and Hans sat on the couch in our living room and I stood in front of them as we fiercely argued about something. I was furious at Walter; like lightning, I slapped him on the cheek and, like lightning, I turned and ran, racing as fast as I could, through the entry hall, down the long narrow corridor, into the toilet cubicle. One half second more, and Walter would have caught me. I bolted the door, caught my breath and waited, and waited. Finally, I collected all my courage and cracked open the door, ready to slam it shut again. No Walter. No revenge, just "Don't do that ever again, or else!" I believed him and kept in mind that "or else" could hurt.

Wherever we were, whatever blips excited us as boys or adults, nothing serious ever came between the three of us, brothers and cousins, and so it has remained to this day, when there are only two of us, Hans and I.

Now, on to Munich, the capital of Bavaria, Mecca for us Mindelheimers. It was the big city of bright lights, street cars, traffic, movement, places to see, and relatives. It also was the chief breeding ground of Hitler's Nazi goons. Of that, I, a kid in elementary school, knew nothing at the time.

Munich is just 90 kilometers from Mindelheim, but travelling there was a project in the 1930s. My mother packed the big tan leather suitcase; my father made sure all was in order with our black Opel, especially the starter mechanism, supplemented with a crank in case the batttery was reluctant. I waited impatiently until we finally were in the car. In cold weather, we needed at least three blankets, one for each of our laps, as the car either lacked a heater or the one it had did little to ward of the chill.

With the suitcase and I stowed, my mother, never a driver, in the passenger seat in front, and my father behind the steering wheel, we rolled through the Obere Tor toward the far-away city. The tops of trees and telephone poles flitted by, but the countryside is missing. Tucked in the back seat, I hardly could see out. That likely is why I made such a big fuss about being able to ride in the rumble seat of some family friends' sporty car, yellow it was, to a picnic out in the country near Munich, in a seat from where I could see the world pass by, sitting up high, by myself, my view unrestricted. My parents finally relented; they took off in our plain black Opel; I was lifted into the leather rumble seat ready for adventure. The friend turned the crank to start the engine. Nothing. Again, and again, still no life. Again and again. He gave up; I cried. No place to go; no sympathy, just a lecture, late in the day: Parents know best; making a scene does not pay.

Munich is where I had my first street car ride. What a neat view! Not like from the back seat of a car from where a little guy had to stretch to see anything, but up on a wooden bench next to a big window. Tall buildings, big stores, elaborate cathedrals, a rush of cars and motorcycles, other street cars, crowds of people, all floated by, just fascinating for me, a kid from provincial Mindelheim.

Just as fascinating was the expansive Munich zoo, my favorite outing from relatives' confining flats. Elephants, lions and bears, monkeys and all sorts of strange creatures in their little worlds set among manicured lawns. Tree-lined, winding paths, and beds of bright flowers all made this like Paradise on earth, just as in the biblical story my mother had read to me. After gawking and asking a stream of questions, when, at last, the adult's legs had tired, we retreated to a round ice cream-parlor table with spindly legs in the garden of the zoo café. A perfect way to spend a sunny day.

Was it really underground, or was it made to look as if it were? Whichever it was, I could have spent another whole day in the model coal mine in the Deutsche Museum. There I stood, gaping, as life-like and life-size miners rode in iron-cage elevators down into the shaft, chipped make-believe coal out of a black seam in brown simulated rock, shoveled it in to carts that then disappeared around a corner, heading for the surface, at least in my imagination. The whole display was an entrancing technological marvel. It made coal mining look so civilized - no dust, no dirt, no sweat, no danger.

Munich. The city fascinated me, but it was our relatives we came to visit.

We seemed to visit my maternal grandparents only in summer, when they had fled the hot city to live at their their vacation home in Tutzing, "Villa Waldeck", a spacious stuccoed house with tile roof and espaliered fruit trees along the south side. As so often with me, food, its aroma, its flavor, its physical being, is the link to the past; it marks the trail from one generation to the next. Here it was *Hasenpfeffer*, rabbit stew. The aroma was enticing, the tender meat delicious, and the boiled potatoes squashed with my fork and then soaked in the piquant gravy were the culmination of permissible self-indulgence. Now, I get Hasenpfeffer only in restaurants, and then rarely. Eating bunnies!? At home? No way! I must admit that the recipe in Aunt Lilian's once enormously popular *Kochbuch für drei und mehr Personen.-* Cookbook for three and more People, a wedding present from my mother, now mine, is a bit gross: "... remove the eyes from the head, then split it and marinate it with the rest of the rabbit for one or more days." I don't know whether or not my step grandmother followed this part of the directions, but I'm sure glad I didn't have to watch the butchery, if she did. I do know that she, Re, short for Regina, a rabbi's daughter, reigned over my grandfather, her husband. She had a big crown of curly hair, an impressive bosom and she engendered the family disputes that roiled my parents' relations with this branch of the family. For me, what emerged from her kitchen neutralized any static that might have been in the air and of whose cause - favoritism - I knew nothing at the time.

Good grooming and a taste for fine food seems to run in both lineages of my ancestors. The menu for my maternal grandprents' wedding defined ritzy. On that day in 1903, my grandfather, Isidor Bach, balding but handsome, sits in a heavy carved armchair. The frock coat, from which emerges a stiff white collar, does not quite hide a vest. His tousers are in diplomats' stripes. His bride, Helene Gundelfinger, my grandfather's first wife, my mother's and Aunt Lilian's mother, sits on the arm rest, her left arm around her groom's shoulder. Carefully coiffured wavy hair, ending in a braided knot in back, frames her tranquil, beautiful face. Her neck is embraced by an embroidered white band that grows into a large bib that, in turn, enhances the top portion of her dark ankle-length dress. Tight long sleeves are billowed above the wrists; these are circled by a band of the same embroidered fabric as employed for the bib. A long chain around her neck ends in a large piece of jewelry she holds in her right hand and a thin chain fastened a little below the bib leads to a small figure-eight broche attached to her dress half way between her left shoulder and waist. An elegant pair they are.

This figure-eight broche transcends time; its image jumped from the photo to open a memory box in my mind. I hurried to our bedroom to retrieve a sturdy little white cardboard box on which Aunt Helen had written "Jewelry for Werner from his parents". I opened the box, looked inside, and, amazingly, here it rested on a little wad of white cotton - the very broche my grandmother had worn on her wedding day. Fascinating. A reminder of a time I never knew, a person I never knew. My grandmother had died young, long before I was born.

The silver broche is tarnished to almost black, the upper loops of the recumbent eight are hammered, the lower ones are smooth. Two small pearls and a tiny black stone adorn the cross-over of the eight. That same box holds my mother's gold watch and a gold snake with tiny ruby eyes, a mini diamond set into its skull, its twisted tail shaped into a ring. Who hid these jewels of infinite value until the Nazi scourge had ended? I thank her, him, them. If my mother still had possessed them at the time of her deportation, they would have been confiscated by the Nazis and melted down, obliterating memories as they had obliterated lives.

Now, back to the menu served on 30 March, 1903, at the Hotel 3 Mohren in Augsburg:

Russian appetizer
Queen's soup

Trout and salmon with mayonnaise
Roast beef a la jardinie`re with aspargus spears
Chicken ragout with truffles and mushrooms
Roasted tongue with peas
Roast goose with French head lettuce
Fruit salad

Chocolate pudding
Fruit ice cream
Torten - Fruit - Candy

In the evening: cold cuts

Bon appetit!

The marriage was brief. Tuberculosis robbed my mother and Aunt Lilian of their mother when they were only three and one.

Medical expertise and facilities were small-town in Mindelheim. So, when my parents tired of one sore throat chasing the next, and they and Dr. Fries, our family doctor, had decided to have my tonsils extracted, my father drove us to Munich for the operation. We stayed at the Bachs, Aunt Berta, my father's oldest sister, Uncle Max, a merchandiser of upholstery supplies and fabrics, and my cousin Heinz, their only child. They lived in a flat that resembled ours in Mindelheim: the same kind of glass door on the second floor, a large foyer, with an oriental rug of busy design just inside the door. My uncle and aunt were relatively old and Heinz was already a teenager when I was six or seven. The place always seemed shadowy and eerily quiet, at least compared to the bright liveliness at home. Visiting there was never much of a treat; I always was told to talk quietly. How could I possibly be myself being quiet? In spite of all the benign attention paid me whenever we visited, leaving was no sorrow. This time, I was especially reluctant to come.

The day after we arrived from Mindelheim, I was led to a doctor's office on the second floor of some building. I was sat into a dentist's type chair, a white oil cloth was draped over me, and I was told to lean back. Then, the surgeon wrapped some gauze over a tea strainer, at least that is what it looked like, and held the sweet-smelling cloth over my nose. Out I was. When I woke up, my throat burned like the inferno evoked by red hot preachers. I was helped out of the chair, down the stairs, into our car, my mother by my side in the back seat, as my father wound his way back to the Bach's flat. I wobbled up the stairs. Aunt Berta opened the door and SPLAT: A big blob of blood shot out of my mouth and splashed right onto that fine oriental rug in the foyer. Consternation! Scurrying to and fro with water bucket and rags. I don't know who was more fussed over, the rug or I. My mother helped me undress and into bed; the rug was restored by Aunt Berta herself, since they had to manage without a maid.

Before this torture session, I was promised all the ice cream I could eat. Ice cream, cold, smooth, and sweet, supposedly would sooth the fire in my throat. I did get all the ice cream I could eat: none. I barely was able to swallow lukewarm home-made chicken broth, the legendary cure-all of Jewish mothers. Finally, after a day or two, I was able to let some ice cream melt down my throat, more medicine than treat. Was I ever happy to leave for Mindelheim, for sunshine and play.

Aunt Bella Weil, a first cousin to my mother, was one of the attractions in Munich. She was a sturdy women, childless and widowed, with a generous heart hidden under her big bosom. Her overstuffed face smiles broadly as she lifts me high above her head when I was just a baby, may be six months old. Later, when I had grown into a boy, she spoiled me wonderfully when neither of my parents was there to stem the stream of cakes and cookies. On one visit, construction cranes were noiselessly floating back and forth in the distance, huge gangly birds feeding the growing steel skeleton of a new building. I was able to watch that enormous erector set without having to build anything myself. I was clumsy at that age; when I just about had lined up screw bolt and nut to join two pieces of metal, the nut would slip from between my left thumb and index finger or the little stamped-out flat screwdriver would slip out of my right hand. My erector set and I did not get along at all; frustration was its twin. It took skill, patience and imagination and I came up short in two of the three.

Aunt Bella, innocent and kind. She, too, was murdered by Nazi Germany.

In Schwandorf, a town in wolf country, and home of Aunt Lilian and Uncle Georg, her husband, I never saw either swans or wolves, but more dogs than I cared for. The city nearly hugs the expansive *Bœhmerwald,* the Bohemian Forest, near the German-Czech border. This large and mysterious forest supposedly still harbored wolves and other dangerous beasts. I was not to stray, unlike in Mindelheim. Was this danger real or just designed to rein me in? At any rate, stray I did not.

In the recesses of my mind I see a large, dim flat and an expansive veranda, both on the second floor, far from wolves. Here I played with a skinny little girl who, in a photo, is about my height, has short wavy to straight hair, and wears a serious expression. A tall bottle rests in the palm of her right hand and her left tightly grasps the top. I stand to her left, intently looking at that now mysterious bottle and in my raised right hand I hold something unidentifiable. From my neck to my knees I am covered with a blue tunic to protect whatever I was wearing from the ravages of serious play. On my feet are white socks and dark shoes.

That little girl, Lilly Gellhaar, a niece of Uncle Georg, also lived in Schwandorf. When I next met her, about sixty years later, in Louisville in Aunt Lilian's living room, she was Lilly Gay, neither skinny nor overly serious and her snow white hair was curly. Her perky expression and lively smile reflect a sharp sense of humor and take-charge personality, so different from the little playmate of long ago.

My other playmate was Uncle Georg's German shepherd dog. As I gingerly rest my left hand on his or her back, nearly waist high to me, I wear a hesitant smile, as if not quite trusting this wolf-like friend. In another photo, five big dogs stand or sit on a U-shaped stair-step structure, one dog on each of the five steps. I stand under the highest perch, smiling slightly as I look at the ground and hold onto one of the support posts with each hand, probably to keep my wobbly knees steady. Uncle Georg had taken me to the training school for dogs to show me how disciplined the dogs were, including his. Judging by my expression, I rather would have been elsewhere, anywhere but where I was.

Aunt Lilian was taller and more sturdily built than my mother. She also had an ample shock of unruly hair, most of it draped toward her left side, almost obscuring her left eye on that day in about 1933 as she stands between me and two neighbor children, older than I, with Uncle Georg's dog in the foreground. Uncle Georg, nearly 10 years older than Aunt Lilian, was short and not handsome. I hardly knew him, because he spent much of his time at "Jakob Friedmann", their small-town emporium of clothing for all ages, for men and women. I was in there only once and hardly could wait to be released from that dark and claustrophobic warren of counters, racks and shelves crowded with merchandise. Our store in Mindelheim, no show place by any means, was elegant by comparison.

Aunt Lilian was independent-minded as a teenager and as a young women, just as she is now, as a nonagenarian. She is a remarkble women, an inspiration.

Gunfire rang through the streets of Munich during some political fuss around 1920 and exploded nearer and nearer to their house. The family decided to hurry to a safer place, away from the racket and danger; Aunt Lilian, in her teens, refused to be rushed; she was not about to abandon her cup of hot, sweet cocoa. She let it cool, finished it, and then sauntered to wherever the rest of the family was in safety. Hot chocolate, *sang froid.*

Her father, my grandfather Isidor, dealt in oil products, by the barrel. When he became ill, he needed a substitute to visit and recruit customers distant from Munich. Aunt Lilian, then about twenty, volunteered for the job. "You can't do that! What will people think, a young single woman travelling by herself by bike and train? It just isn't done." She did it anyhow. "What people think is their business. I couldn't care less. As long as I know what I do, that's the only thing that counts." She travelled for her father until she married Uncle Georg, in 1930.

Aunt Lilian always liked the challenge of business better than minding household duties and her grades in school already had reflected her interests. She earned respectable grades in all subjects except those related to the domestic arts, exactly those prized by potential mothers-in law and their sons in girls of her time. Her household efficiency met with a mixture of disdain and amusement among the rest of the family. She served some meals on paper plates instead of on china, a serious breach of family standards. "Why waste my time washing dishes when I have guests?" was her response.

She was an outdoors enthusiast, a tireless hiker in the mountains of Germany, and an energetic swimmer. Even in her eighties she strode firmly as we wandered over hills up and down steps and inclines. Until her early nineties she enjoyed walks in verdant parks of Kentucky, her home state since the 1940s. Her vision is impaired, but her mind grasps every word she hears. She knows what is happening today and looks forward to tomorrow. She knows the mores of today, but judges them by the standards of her principles. She took the city bus to her polling place until she was nearly 95 and never missed a vote in all her years as an American, a time when too many one-third her age are too lazy to walk a block to cast their vote. American citizenship, democracy, volunteerism, and civic duty are linked imperatives for her.

Does Aunt Lillian provide a glimpse of what her sister, my mother, would have been like in her years of maturity and old age had she not been murdered by Nazi Germany?

We visited Ulm, a medium-sized city about a train-hour north of Mindelheim, just once. The city has vanished from my mind; its only remaining artifact is the sidewalk fronting on the apartment building where we visited the Guggenheimers, Uncle Benno, Aunt Malchen, Uncle Alfred's sister, and Ilse, their daughter. It was on that strip of concrete where Ilse, three years older than I, taught me to roller skate, patiently, kindly, carefully, till I finally could roll on my own. Here she was not the distantly related cousin whom I rarely saw, but like an older, caring sister. By the time we left Ulm, a few days later, I would have worn skates to the dinner table if I had been allowed. Once at home, I got my own skates to race on the sidewalks of Mindelheim. The clumsiness of these skates did not discourage me at all nor did the occasional spill and red-roughened knee when the clamps that held the skates to the soles of my shoes slipped off and I took a dive in mid-stride. This rolling, noisy steel toy felt like lead weights on my feet but it let me flit down the sidewalk, arms swinging, a breeze in my face. Once the skates were off, my feet felt weightless, as if I were floating on air. These skates were a bother to clamp on and tighten with a hollow square key; too loose and they would slip off; too tight and they squished my foot, very different from today's racy in-line skates/boots. But, that is what I had and enjoyed. They were the same kind of skates on which our children, Joan's and mine, learned to roller skate in California, three decades later, when I had to muster the same sort of patience that Ilse had lavished on me.

Ilse's parents appeared ancient to me, just like Aunt Berta and Uncle Max Bach in Munich. They seemed so slow, quiet, disconnected from children, but also kind and caring. At the party celebrating Aunt Malchen's and Uncle Alfred's father's 70th birthday, her serious oval face is bounded by slightly wavy hair parted in the middle and pulled tightly toward the nape of the neck. Uncle Benno's bushy eyebrows arch over a quizzical half smile; a shock of gray hair seems to float on top of his head. Ilse, about 9 years old, sits on the floor in a dress of large white and dark checks with a Peter Pan collar bounding her neck. Her page-boy hair cut frames a charming I-like-to-be-in-pictures smile.

My relatives in Memmingen, Munich, Schwandorf and Ulm were not the only ones who dot the map of my childhood, but they are the ones who live in my mind distinctly, rather than just as shadows. There were old aunts, aunts in the sense of female relatives of distant connection, where I was forced to sit still on a chair or couch covered with dull grey or brownish-green itchy fabric. Much as I appreciated their sweet pacifiers, these were not enough compensation for what seemed like hours of boredom as the adults droned on with stories of no interest to me. There always were just aunts, never uncles; may be they had died or the aunts never had married.

Dim light bulbs hidden under cloche-shaped shades of hideous lamps sitting on little round tables with legs curled just above the floor emphasized the stuffiness of the atmosphere and inflated boredom. No place for a kid like me.

Still, these shadows in the rooms of aunts, maiden or widowed, were bright islands compared to the thickening gloom that enveloped Germany's Jews as the Nazi government and its millions of enthusiastic minions blocked more and more light from their, from our, lives as the 1930s drifted toward disaster. In the meantime, my world, at least, was safe. I was allowed to revel in a childhood as delightful as any youngster could wish.

In the Center of my Universe

Our home, our habits, our customs

Our flat on the Marktplatz - apartment makes it sound too small - was reached by way of a wide staircase, made safe with a burnished brown railing on the drop-off side. These stairs led from a hall beyond the arched cave-like entry of the building to our floor, the second. A white-painted wooden double entrance door separated our flat from the generous landing. Ripply yellow glass in the center of the door and in the fixed wings on both of its sides prevented snooping. A brass bell button and escutcheon plate to the right of the door called attention to themselves with their golden reflection.

I clattered up the stairs, rang the bell, impatiently waited until our maid opened the door and then either turned left and ran through the expansive vestibule decorated with an oriental rug, a few side chairs and table, a mirror, a coat rack and umbrella stand down the long hall to the toilet, just in time. I hated to interrupt playing for such a mundane need. Else I turned right and followed my nose to the kitchen to find out what smelled so good.

The kitchen was my favorite room. Gas or electric ranges sporting thermostats, buttons and dials were not even a dream. A wood- and coal- fired range occupied most of the wall to the left. This iron workhorse provided warmth in winter and was temperamental all year. It induced wails among the ladies of the house, especially the maid, who also was cook, baker and a dear friend of mine, when a cake did not rise enough and the center came out half-baked and "cheesy". The disaster mostly was less serious than the wails were loud. It was pride that suffered more than the cake.

Our maid, face and name obscured by time, always left enough cake batter in the bowls to make licking worthwhile and she never seemed to mind my snooping in pots and pans to see what was cooking. When I was five or six, a set of play dishes, enamelled light blue with a dark blue rim, became mine. The set included a soup tureen, white inside, with a big belly. I was allowed to ladle the soup into it myself and carry it to the dinner table. No matter how humble the soup, spooning it from my own tureen instead of from an ordinary soup bowl converted it into ambrosia. When cookies or bread were on the menu, I was allowed to have my own clump of dough, to shape it and to then to savor it when baked, right then, as soon as it had cooled enough to not burn my mouth.

A walk-in pantry the size of a small room adjoined the kitchen. On one of the top shelves tempted the cookie jar, high up to keep my father from turning temptation into quick action and me out of it altogether. Every now and then, temptation overcome my father. He lifted me up; I handed him two cookies, one for him and one for me. I was lucky when we had some enriched with chopped glazed fruit; they were the one and only kind he did not like, I then ending up with two. After all, couldn't put a cookie touched by a boy's hand back into the jar.

Straight down the hall, still to the right of the front door, opened a double door to our formal dining room. It was huge and elegant, especially in the image recorded before the dinner honoring my grandfather on his 70th birthday. A long table that accommodates five high-backed chairs on each side dominates the center. The nearly 50 legs of chairs and table rest on an oriental rug that extends well beyond the chairs and ends of the table, which is covered with an impeccably ironed white tablecloth. The table is set with white plates from where rise white cones of napkins, each one carefully centered. Water glasses and long-stemmed wine goblets, both decorated with etchings, are arrayed toward the center. A beautiful, festive setting.

Four lamps point upward from a chandelier that lights the table; the photo does not reveal how many were pointing down because they are hidden by a garland of live greenery out of which seem to grow 70 white candles in honor of my grandfather's birthday. Suspended from the chandelier is the number 70, also fashioned from greenery. A fireplace with mantle dominates the wall in the rear. Nine pewter plates of various sizes, the largest one in the middle, two beer steins and what looks like a covered sugar bowl decorate the mantle shelf. To the right of the fireplace is a side table with a bouquet of flowers as a centerpiece. Having been only a tike at the time, I remember nothing about the event.

My grandfather stands at the far end, near the fireplace, immaculately dressed in a vested dark suit, white shirt and black bow tie. He looks distinguished with his white goatee, white mustache, and full head of white hair parted slightly to the left of center. A gentleman worthy of this grand display.

Not in the picture, but in my memory, are some side tables, my father's desk, a leather sofa, and bookcases. Glass doors kept the dust off the *Grosse Brockhaus*, the German equivalent of the *Encyclopedia Britannica,* and just as likely more honored as a sign of middle-class aspirations fulfilled than as a living reference. I see the bookcase being opened only once or twice in the years of my childhood.

This big expanse would have made a great indoor play playground, but it was off-limits to me, other than to talk to my father when he was at his desk and only after I had knocked on the door that opened from the every-day living-dining room. The "no play" rule was lifted for our train set. "Our", because no other room was large enough for my friends and me, and occasionally my father, to play engineer, conductor and station agent.

The informal dining-sitting room was smaller and cozy, with dining table and chairs, a couch and a chest of drawers topped by a porcelain vase. It was where we gathered for our meals and to socialize. Both of these rooms looked out over the Marktplatz, the center of Mindelheim, where the action was, if any, my friends' and my favorite playground.

A door to the left of the entry and across the vestibule led to my parent's bedroom with its then fashionable white furniture. All other memories of that room have met whiteout, except one. I had to tell my mother something, immediately. I ran into the room, without knocking, and there she was just pulling her underpants up under her slip. "Werner!!!" I stopped, wheeled around and out I was.

At the end opposite of the formal dining room, to the left of the entry, stretched a long hall, painted pale sky blue. A series of windows on the right provided daylight and looked down on an unadorned courtyard surrounded by other buildings. Bedroom doors, including one to mine, lined the inside walls. All are empty in my mind, with only the white porcelain chamber pot visible under each bed. Don't snicker, the toilet was down the unheated hall and winters are cold in Mindelheim.

My bed stood to the right of the door, just visible in the dimness of the room, reminiscent of a burial vault, when we first moved into the flat. The wallpaper, of all colors imaginable, was black. Black with gold flowers and foliage. Black wall paper in any room was too much, but in a child's room - horrors! The black disappeared in short order, but its replacement left no trace of memory.

Since sleeping and lying still were not synonymous for me, my bedding often would land on the floor before morning. That was harmless in summer, but not in winter. To keep me covered, my parents had a woodworker fashion a set of "scissors", two smoothly finished, brown-stained, hardwood pieces, three or four inches wide and about three feet long, joined at one end with a pivot. The open ends were stuck between my mattress and the bedframe and the top reached at least a foot above the feather bed enclosed in a white brocade-like cotton bag. This inverted V kept my bedding and me safely on the bed through my dreams.

On the left, at the end of the long hall, was our one and only bathroom. That was enough. Primping was not a family habit; the ladies felt no need to hide their faces under makeup and my father was expert at shaving his face with a straight razor, smooth and with rarely a nick. The bathroom had all but one of the modern conveniences. The footed tub took up the left wall, and in the corner stood the water heater, fired with wood. That explains why we, and most people at that time in small towns, washed twice daily, but took a bath only once or twice a week. The white-enamelled cast-iron sink protruded from the shorter wall. Missing was the toilet; it terminated the hall on the right.

This jewel, its temperature controlled by the weather, was a single-seat indoor outhouse with naked light bulb on the ceiling and a small window for ventilation. The seat rested on a box-like structure and the disposal mechanism depended on instantaneous gravity: A long pipe led straight down to a septic tank. Unlike in more modern homes, there wasn't even a flusher tank near the ceiling where a pull on a chain with a large ring at the end might have openend a valve and let water gush forth. We just used a water bucket that had to be filled in the bath room and carried accross the hall to be available as needed. On a hot summer's day no one lingered over a magazine, nor in winter for fear of frost bite.

Our maid's room was on the third floor, under the roof. That was *verboten* territory. She likely had enough of my company during her working hours.

On the ground floor, off the courtyard, spread the large laundry room, concrete-floored and painted sanitary white, that served us and the Gonsers, our landlord, who lived on the floor below us. Two large copper cauldrons for boiling, yes boiling, the linens once a month, stood to the left of the door. Were the linens changed monthly or more often? Whichever it was, they were refreshed once a month, on wash day Monday. Next to the cauldrons sat a double tub and two ribby wash boards over which sweated two laundresses, stocky strong women from the town, their faces flushed, one stirring the soapy brew with a wooden paddle large enough to row a canoe, the other one working the linens against the washboard. They were friendly types who did not mind me watching them from a safe distance. How people went about doing their jobs always has fascinated me, whether the jobs were simple and physical or complicated and delicate.

In the courtyard, ouside the laundry room, toward our side of center, stood a butcher block where our maid chopped off the heads of the live chickens she had bought at the farmers' market. Once, on a warm day, when I headed to the toilet through the long hall, an unearthly screech stopped me in my tracks. I looked out an open window: A headless chicken was flapping its white but bloody wings nearly half way up to my window; our maid, down on the ground, bloody hatchet waving above her head, yelled *"Schau! Schau!"*.- Look! Look! A few seconds more of lifeless flight, and the bird thudded to the ground. Amazing! How could that be? No, I did not run downstairs to have a closer look and yes, the chicken tasted just fine.

Once a chicken was dead and still, the maid scalded it in a laundry tub. This was a delicate operation. Too much, and the chicken would be partly cooked; too little, and the feathers could not be pulled out cleanly. Once the chicken was featherless, the maid singed it over the open flame of the kitchen stove to burn off remnant down. If I didn't know it before then, the stench of burned feathers announced that chicken was on the menu that day. Cooking in the 1930s was not a dilettante's sport.

A flight of wooden stairs led to the cellar, the dimly lit and dankly cool repository of the fruits of summer and fall. It was our natural refrigerator, our preserver of food. Shelves held rows of jars filled with jam, covered with a layer of paraffin. No just plopping a sterile lid onto a jar and tightening a metal screw top, as I do now. The paraffin had to be melted over a double boiler and then carefully poured over the hot jam to make an air-tight seal. No simple lids and rings.

On the cellar floor stood two large lidded urns, each about three feet high. I took off the lid and leaned it against the urn; a white gelatin-like mass greeted my eyes and spooked my fingers as I reached in to retrieve however many eggs I was told to fetch in the nearly spherical metal-mesh egg basket with a handle in the middle. The chilly slithery stuff was silica gel. It kept air out and moisture in; it preserved the eggs for the season when few were on the market and those that were, cost plenty.

Back upstairs, beyond the city wall, Mindelheim, like any respectable Bavarian town, boasted its own brewery. We toured it on a school outing; after all, knowing how beer is made was just as important as knowing that milk comes from cows. Huge shiny vats connected by strands of metal tubing overwhelmed us young boys and the spicy aroma of fermenting mash impressed my nostrils. Whiffs of freshly drawn beer smelled much nices. Beer was at home in our home. Still, I never saw a bottle of beer and cans for beer were not even in the universe. The beer came fresh and bubbly from a barrel at the *Hotel Die Post*, The Mail Stop, where, before trains and cars, the horse-drawn mail and passenger coaches discharged and took on their load. The hotel stood, and still stands, just catercorner across the street from our flat. Occasionally, my dad let me carry his beer stein to *Die Post* to have it filled to the brim. I watched intently as the white foam rose to the top, high enough to spill a bit over the edge. This foam was mine. How tinglingly delicious it was as I opened my mouth and clamped my lips around one peak after another until only a thin layer was left. Never would I have thought of taking a sip of the golden brew below the foam; first, my father would have noticed; second, there was no need, because I almost always got a sip anyhow. With beer a part of life, just like milk, it simply was another food and there was no need to steal any then, or gorge on it later in life.

Even if beer was not part of every Mittagessen, if that meal was herring with boiled potatoes, beer belonged. A big bowl of pickled herring fillets drowned in cream to dampen the flavor, with slivers of onions mixed in - heavenly! Next to that bowl a biggger bowl, this one heaped with steaming boiled potato cubes, plain but fragrant, an appetizing combination. We, Joan and I, still honor that tradition, with a Scandinavian accent. On a hot summer's day, cream-doused herring, dilled boiled potatoes, a green salad, and a glass of beer to chase the aquavit. Skol!

Oxtail soup, another family dish, still is one of my favorites. Pieces of oxtail, cut at the joints (Only ignoramouses saw through them and leave rough edges that annoy the tongue.), cooked four hours, with barley and bay leaf, carrots, onions, leeks or other greens added a half hour before dinner, superb! It is like a blanket on the belly, warm and comfortable on a cold winter evening. After we cut most of the meat off the bones, table manners are suspended so we can dislodge the rest of the meat and the tender cartilage with our teeth. Once the bones are bare, there follows the intense pleasure of sucking their rich juices out through the pores. Superman and Wonderwoman food.

No German household would be without them on the table, at least once a week; it would have been unpatriotic: sausages and potato salad in summer and boiled potatoes the rest of the year. Bratwurst and potato salad drizzled with oil, not drowned in mayonnaise, and perked up with cider vinegar and diced onions, delicious, again.

Dessert was a must in our family. A dinner, or Mittagessen, without dessert would be like a second date without a kiss, pretty good, but not a thrill. We always had dessert, sometimes two. Just like kisses, why stop at one? Cake, cookies, pudding, cream-enriched fruit, whatever it was, I loved it, even though I never got as much as I thought I deserved, which, of course, always was more than whatever size treat was on my plate.

Dampfnudeln, literally steam noodles, were a special dessert. For these marvels, the yeast dough is steamed on top of the stove, not baked in it. The heat expands the carbon dioxide generated by the yeast until the dough sets and, *voila'*, a large plate of slightly sweet, feather-light balls is ready to be doused with rich vanilla sauce. Looks great, is delectable, sounds simple, are devlishly hard to make. The recipe in Lamprecht's *Kochbuch für Drei und mehr Personen* requires an entire page of detailed instructions but says nothing about the art and skill that only practice, passed down from generation to generation, can teach. Failure for even experienced cooks, like our maid, always loomed, especially on the temperamental stoves of the age. I probably savored my last Dampfnudel in 1938. Food and kisses, treasured memories.

If wild strawberries never have crossed your lips, you have missed a luscious kiss of nature. We, everyone in our family, picked these little, bright red marvels with their intense flavor on the edges of woodlands around Mindelheim. A bowl of these edible gems, lathered with thick cream, was the crown of June. Raspberries, currants and gooseberries all were indulgences of high summer. In fall, the enticing aromas of apples and pears mingled in the dining room, kitchen and cellar.

We ate well.

No day would have been complete without a *Bedhupferle*, literally, a bed jumper, a chocolate square or candy at bedtime. These treats were a powerful incentive to behave at least minimally well during the day, and especailly toward evening, when the days' rush would not have erased the memory of some transgression I might have committed, one that would have deprived me of that sweet close of the day. I could count on good-night kisses, no matter what, but a Bedhupferle was no sure thing.

Food, it invites me to linger in word and deed. It's one of the great pleasures of life, one that can last into old age, when some others may fade.

BITTE and *DANKE*, and *ja bitte* or *nein danke* were the touchstone words of my young life. Without a please, nothing was to be had; without a thank you, it would not stay. As time passed, with insistent prodding by my elders, and by setting a good example, these words of pleading and gratitude automatically put themselves where needed. They indeed turned out to be magic words, especially among strangers, whether relatives or not; they bridged gaps, helped over rough spots and smoothed life. People appreciate politeness, especially from children. Being touted as an example to be imitated by children of friends or relatives simultaneously embarassed and pleased me. I could attain what I needed and sometimes what I wanted, simply by being polite, never by wheedling or whining, just by being polite. I know it works. May that is why wheedling and whining - even the sound of these words annoys - set my nerves on edge.

Politeness also ruled our table. We all sat at our customary places around the table, my father at one end, my grandmother at the other end, Aunt Erna across from my mother and me. I hankered to sit in my father's chair when he was absent; no way! If someone was missing at the table, for any reason, that space remained empty in recognition of that person's importance and to emphasize the void created by the absence. At any meal, no one, but no one, started to eat until everyone was served. No one slurped soup, coffee or tea. No one wiped his or her mouth with the back of the hand; we used linen napkins and I my bib before I graduated to a napkin. I, as a child, spoke when spoken to or when there was a temporary lull in the conversation. If I interrupted an adult, the attempt was squelched before the first word had completely escaped my mouth. Rules or not, I must have had enough opportunity to express myself; I never felt ignored.

These habits and rules may seem to be a bit uncompromising now, but they underlined the uniqueness of each member of the family and served to instill in me, the child, respect for adults, not only for those in the family, but for adults in general. Being well-mannered helped me in my young years without parents, even if it occasionally pinched.

Our maid not only minded me when no one else was at home, I had to mind her, else retribution would follow when tattled about my misbehaviour. I never gave it a thought at the time, but once my sensibilities had matured, I was bothered that our maid, the one who had prepared the meal and carried it to the table, could not join us at that table. She had to eat in the kitchen, by herself. The expected norms of a society, whether of a family or at large, rarely are noticed, much less challenged, especially not by a child in Germany.

The Jew-baiting edits of Nuremberg of 1935 forbade Jews to employ Arian maids. Nazi newspapers and posters on kiosks and in store windows in Germany, including in Mindelheim cartooned Jewish men as being over-sexed monsters, just as many whites had depicted black men in the United States; ergo, Jews could not be trusted with innocent Arian maids in the house. There was no way out; my parents had to discharge our long-time helper, much to their mutual chagrin. As there were no or almost no Jewish women who worked as maids, certainly not in Mindelheim, our family now was on its own with all housework, except for washing the laundry. The strong and dedicated women who labored over the hot cauldron still were allowed into our laundry room where sexual adventures presumably were unlikely.

Below us, on the first floor, lived the Gonsers, the owners of the building and of the upholstering business that fronted on the sidewalk with a large showcase window where they displayed couches and chairs they had renewed. They were older than my parents and had only adult children. They treated me like a grandchild.

The Gonsers invited me down to their flat each Christmas Eve so I could admire the ornament-laden pine and the other festive touches in their living room. The fact that sweets were plentiful was not a minor inducement. Now, I shudder when I think of their splendid Christmas tree, lighted by the flames of dozens of white candles set into little clip holders attached to the tree's branches. These living lights spread a warm flickering glow over the faces and the room. Every now and then, the breeze generated by a passer-by caused a flame to stretch to a needle just above a candle. Then, the pine-scented aroma of the singed needle propelled the nearest person to jump up and snuff out that candle. Disaster averted.

The entire family joined in singing *Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht* and I listened entranced to this lovely melody and to other seasonal songs. Unlike some culturally assimilated Jews, we never had a "Hanukah bush" during the Festival of Lights. The glow on our faces came from a brass eight-armed menorah and *Ma-'oz tzur* (Rock of Ages) was our song, with Aunt Erna at the piano and the best voice in the family. Once old enough, I was allowed to take the helper candle, the Shamos, the ninth one, and light the rest of them, one on the first day, two on the second until all flickered on the the last day of Hanukah. Beautiful as it would have been to have the room just bathed in candle light, that was not allowed. These were candles of memory and devotion and they were not allowed to work. Gradually, with coaching from the adults, I also learned to recite the Brocha, the blessing over the Hanukah candles. Then, this glowing holiday was complete for me - I lighted the candles, said the blessings and received lots of presents, a shower that started less than two months after I had been born and kept reappearing until my last Hanukah with my parents, in 1938. Except that year, the lights seemed more like votive candles than those of joy and presents were modest. It was the Hanukah just weeks after the Kristallnacht progrom, the opening gun of the total war against the Jews of Germany and all of Europe.

Earlier in winter, sometimes before Hanukah, sometimes after, depending on the whim of the calendar, the Gonser men, father and son, tried to scare goodness into me. On December 6 of the years when I still believed in fairy tales, the older Mr. Gonser played Sankt Nikolaus and the younger one Knecht Ruprecht, his servant.

After dinner, a loud knock on the hall door. A rough voice asked the maid: "*W o isch d'r Werner?*" Stomping of feet. My father opened the door to the dining room. I ran to my mother and hung on to her skirt. There, right in front of me they stood: St. Nick, with a kind smile under his bushy white eyebrows, wore a red great coat with fluffy white trim around his bulging waist and from his head rose a red bishop's hat with gold trim. His nose peered out over a generous white mustache and his mouth was almost hidden between it and a white beard down to his chest. In his right hand he carried a gold bishop's mitre. Very impressive.

Knecht Ruprecht looked mean. His beard and mustache were brown, his cap was brown, a huge brown coat of sack cloth covered him from neck to floor; in one hand he carried a heavy knotted stick and the other one held on to a big gunny sack slung over his shoulder. Very intimidating. His sight made me shrink into my slippers.

Knecht Ruprecht rumbled out a list of did-I-do-this and did-I-do-that questions for the past twelve months. How did he know all these transgressions of mine? How come he didn't know any of the good things I did? There must have been some. Do you promise to be more obedient next year? Will you do this but not that? In a shaking voice over weak knees, I stammered whatever seemed to be the right answer. Then, just before I was ready to bawl, St. Nick took over. He was sure I would behave better in the coming year; he saw that I was sorry for the troubles I had caused my parents, and, as a reward, instead of the big stick on my rear, he commanded Knecht Ruprecht to empty his sack on the floor. Out tumbled oranges, apples, nuts, Lebkuchen, those flat honey spice cakes with pictures of St. Nick glued to the top and a thin white wafer on the bottom. Wow! Still shaking, I thanked the two intruders; they turned and shuffled out the door. Now, everybody smiled, I got kisses from all, and my heart jumped back from my stomach into its proper place. What a relief!

And that was the evening of St. Nikolaus Day in our home in Mindelheim, much like in countless other homes all over Germany where parents liked to scare and praise their children, both at once.

The Gonsers clearly respected and liked my family. They threatened to meet with axes and hatchets any Nazi who would come to harm us. My parents appreciated these noble sentiments and knew that they were sincere. Eventually, they had to be hollow promises. No one came to harm my parents physically while they were allowed to live in Mindelheim, they just were ordered to move from our flat in the center of of town to a dinky apartment on a narrow side street. That was after I already was safely in Switzerland. Much happened before then.

I do not recall our Seder on Passover, because we had none: We always celebrated it with the Heilbronners in Memmingen. Whether or not we cleared the house of leavened bread as enjoined by Jewish law I do not remember, but strictly non-biblical Matzokaffee is fresh in my mind. I have been infatuated with this aromatic concoction of matzos, coffee, sugar, and cream ever since I first was allowed to taste a spoonful. Take a thick-walled mug, break apart the first matzo, unleavened cracker-like bread, and stuff a layer of pieces into the bottom inch or so of the mug. Add a sprinkle of suger. Then another inch or so of matzo, squeezed down with both thumbs as firmly as reasonably possible; another sprinkle of sugar and so on, until the mug is full to the rim. (An ordinary cup will not do; my father once busted out the side of a cup as he pushed down on the matzo.) A drizzle of cream crowns the top layer of matzo. Now pour in the very hot, strong coffee. Decant carefully, so the coffee won't scoot off the top layer of the crisp matzo and mess up the table cloth. The matzos rise above the rim as they swell with the mixture of coffee and cream. Still, just keep on pouring the coffee over the matzos until the liquid reaches within a hair's thickness of the rim. A few matzo pieces may tumble over the rim; that is why the mug should sit on a big saucer. Then, gently push down the mass with a teaspoon so all matzos are in the creamy coffee. By now, the coffee has receded to well below the lip of the mug, absorbed by the matzos. Add a little more cream and sugar and keep pouring coffee until it finally no longer recedes. It's the only way one can fit two mugs worth of coffee into one mug. Then, slowly dig out a spoonful of the coffee-and-cream soaked, slightly sweet matzo mix, inhale the aroma and then spoil your palate with this seasonal treat. Passover without Matzokaffee is just a holiday; with it, it's a festival.

We observed the religious ceremonies of Passover in Memmingen, at the only synagogue near Mindelheim. There, we attended services with Onkel-Alfred-und-Tante-Helene, cousins Walter and Hans, and their grandfather David. It was at their long, richly set table where Uncle Alfred presided over the formalities of the Seder. This is where us youngsters' patience was tried with the reciting of the endless-seeming story and repetitive ceremonies of Passover dictated by the Haggada, the story of of the plagues God had flung at the Egyptian oppressors of Jews and of the Exodus of our ancestors from the land of the Nile. A glass of wine for the adults, now, then, and later, a blessing over this herb and that, over matzos and washing of hands. Even Aunt Helene became impatient. Her grand matzoball soup, tender yellowish globes floating in aromatic chicken broth, needed to be eaten, soon. It was the first round of her holiday kitchen mastery, followed by brisket and potatoes soaked in gravy, and rounded out with a yellow sponge cake made with matzo flour, matzos ground very fine.

Friends, games and pranks

How did I happen to have the friends I had? Proximity certainly was a factor. One lived next door, another one down the street one way and a third down the street the other way. We four likely weren't the only boys who lived in the center of Mindelheim although I remember no others. Did our four sets of parents nudge us together? I doubt it, because they did not socialize among themselves and my parents never had suggested I play with this boy or that one, or the reverse, that I should not play with a particular kid. What drew us together, more than anything else, must have been a sense of adventure, a degree of rascality, harmless but prickly enough to be noticed and sometimes frowned upon by adults. Two of my friends stuck with me until I had to leave home; the parents of the third one cut the tie. I, as a child of Jews, had become poison.

I had one other friend, a friend from school. I remembered him the least when I reminisced into a tape recorder over 20 years ago, but it is his friendship and his recollections of our time together that transcended the upheavals of the decades since we sat in school. Werner Trapp and I became buddies because of our religions. He was the only Protestant in our class in elementary school and I was the only Jew. Catholicism did and does pervaded life in Bavaria, public and private. Although the school we attended was a public school, one hour of religious studies was part of the daily routine. Since neither one of us two Werners was Catholic, we were excused from the class and set free to play for that hour in the middle of the school day. It was our favorite period.

As we sauntered along the Maximilianstrasse looking for adventure, we passed the monastery of the Franciscan friars. The monks, with their frizzy halo tonsur and their hooded brown tent-like cassocks, tied with a thick white cord, appeared to be kindness incarnate. They smiled at us and greeted us, but they would not give either one of us one of the little cards showing a picture of some saint, sort of a celestial baseball card, because they knew that we were outside the one and only true faith. The cards were so pretty and I was disappointed that I, unlike other kids who received them as a reward for kneeling at the feet of a monk to receive a blessing, could not have any, even if I had kneeled.

Right next to the monastery, in the direction of the Obere Tor, the grotto-like workshop of the town blacksmith enticed. Two main sources of light diminished the dimness. One was the open door, wide as for a barn and curved on top to allow draft horses to easily enter; the other was the fire pit over which the blacksmith magically converted pieces of iron into horseshoes or tools of the farmer's or teamster's day. Then, in the mid-1930s, majestically conformed horses hauled freight wagons on Mindelheim's streets. If they dropped some apples as they clanked along, the street sweeper, a man, not a machine, would soon collect them with a shovel and dump them into his big-wheeled cart. These globes were confined, easily visible and avoidable, not like the slithery splashes left by draft oxen, soon almost hidden under a dull, thin crust on the grayish-black asphalt, laying in wait for hurrying naked feet.

The blacksmith's muscular hands held the horseshoe-shaped iron in a clamp and maneuvered it over a white-hot flame kept burning brightly by judicious blasts of air from a bellows operated by his apprentice. Then, methodically and melodically, just as in Wagner's opera*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, his hammer hit the white hot metal as it rested on the anvil. He hit it here and there, just at the right places and at the correct angle until it had cooled to a red glow. Then he again heated it to whiteness and repeated the cadence until he had the shape to fit the hoofs of the horse tethered to the right of the anvil, but out of reach of flying sparks. When the blacksmith thought he had it about right, he quenched the shoe in a water bath, letting loose a hiss of steam. Now, he stepped over to the horse, patted its flank, grabbed and lifted the leg of the horse and rested it on his thigh, protected by a thick, wide leather apron. If the shoe did not fit exactly, back to the flame and the cadence; if it did, he set the shoe against the horse's hoof and hammered in several horseshoe nails through pre-drilled holes to fix the shoe in place. The horses were used to this intrusion and hardly budged.

The sight of teams of two or four elegantly muscled draft horses pulling a wagon piled high with wooden beer barrels from the local brewery to inns and beer gardens in town was a convergence of power and grace. The teamster sat on a bench mounted in front of the wagon, reins in one hand, whip in the other. He snapped the whip every now and then, more to practice than to urge on the horses, it seemed to me. The horses knew where to go, how fast, and where to stop.

Watching the blacksmith practice his skill must have imbued me with admiration and respect for anyone expert in a craft, whether it be a blacksmith, glass blower, weaver, knitter, carpenter or tile setter. There is beauty in these creative excercises that shape the shapeless or simple into necessities or luxuries. How readily can our grandchildren see and learn to appreciate such skills in the third millennium of the western era? There is no poetry in dragging a computer mouse or nudging a little plastic ball.

A glance at the hands of the clock on the Obere Tor and the other Werner and I hurried back to school.

Jakob Fries, our doctor's son, Hanns Kramer our butcher's son, and Adolf Hundegger were my neighborhood buddies.

Jakob lived right next door, to the left, facing our building. His house was the fanciest on the Marktplatz and the only business it housed was his father's medical office. Three or four broad steps with iron railing on the sides led up to the carved front double door; the façade was painted an inviting butter yellow, much nicer than the dull presence of the house in which we lived. Jakob was about the same height as I was, although I was taller when I was eight or nine than when I was older, at least relatively. I was among the taller boys in grade school, but kept moving tailward when we were arrayed by height in physical education, till I ended up second or third from the end of the line in high school.

Jakob had an adventurous glint in his eyes, a mouth that readily smiled and a head of sunshine-reddish blond curls. He was my best friend. He came
over to play in our flat, with my endless supply of toys, from balls to trains to games. I occasionally played at his house. He had a sister, older than we, who had her own room with a solid white door broken only by a prominent key hole to accommodate a large iron key. He hunkered down and peered through the key hole; he silently nudged me to look through the key hole, too, as his sister was undressing. I squinted my right eye and found the keyhole with the left one, but, there was nothing to be seen; his sister was off to one side of the room, out of reach of my eye. I had been neither particularly eager nor reluctant to follow Jakob's lead. Not having any sibs, male or female, or any close female cousins, and not knowing that there was anything interesting to be curious about, I didn't know why looking through this key hole might be such a thrill for us third grade boys. We silently snuck off and Jakob never did tell me what the big deal might be, if he knew.

Dr. Fries smoked cigarettes. He sometimes sent Jakob to buy them at the *Hotel Die Post*, across the street. Did Jakob swipe some of his father's smokes or some money to buy cigarettes under the pretense of buying them for his father? Whichever, we ended up with cigarettes, took them to our play house made from cardboard, sticks and imagination, right below the windows of both of our houses in the courtyard that divided one from the other. Jakob also helped himself to some matches in a match box; I would have been much too chicken to do any of these things. We each took one of these white sticks, pressed one end between our lips, as we had seen adults perform the rite, then lit the the other end, and inhaled till the hot end glowed. We must have produced more coughs and smoke than thrills, because my father, who happened to look down into the courtyard, noticed smoke drifting out of cracks in our shack. A big shout from him, a fast exit for me and a glowing rear, all within minutes. No more cigarettes for me for a long time, and then only a few while I was in college. The stink outweighed the fashion.

The Marktplatz, just below our living room windows, became a bustling scene on Markttag. Each Saturday, the square was full of farmers and of maids and Hausfrauen inspecting the offerings and haggling about the price of their week's supply of fruits, vegetables, eggs, live chickens, ducks and geese, and venison in fall.

(I must digress. If you never have savored a roasted stuffed goose, you have missed a gustatory indulgence. The rich aroma, the shiny brown crisp skin, the goose fat-enriched stuffing, the flavorful tender meat that outshines the tasty legs and thighs of the best fresh turkey; what a feast! Although we could afford goose only on special occasions, maybe once a year, I still can see and taste it. But, what I remember might be the fattened weeder geese I used to buy in the late 1950s and early 1960s at a poultry market, just off Butler Avenue in southwesterly Fresno, and that Joan then converted into a second incarnation of the roasted geese from my childhood in Mindelheim. These birds had worked hard all spring and early summer plucking weeds from between cotton plants in fields on the west side of Fresno County. The geese shunned the cotton seedlings because a bitter compound renders them unpalatable, but they eagerly snapped up the tender weeds.

How did the farmers get the geese to patrol the field and not waddle or fly away? The geese did not thrive on weeds alone. Farm hands set boxes with grain on one end of the field and pans with water on the other end. Then, as the geese wandered along the rows from one attractant to the other, they foraged on weeds, reducing the need for hoeing, thus saving humans sweat, sore backs, and aching arms. The birds strayed neither on ground, because the field was bordered with a chicken-wire fence, about two feet high, nor by air, because one wing had been clipped. Then, when the cotton had outgrown the weeds, the geese were retired and fattened for slaughter in fall. Affordable goose roast died out when chemicals replaced weeder geese.)

Now back to the Marktplatz.

We boys liked to snoop about the market. As noon approached, buyers and sellers headed for their Mittagessen, the maids and Hausfrauen toward home to cook what they had bought, the farmers toward their favorite inn and beer. The horses already had been taken to stables where they were fed and watered or to the blacksmith to have their hoofs checked and shod. The quieted Marktplatz now was ours. Adolf Hundegger, slim, not tall either, brown straight hair, parted on the right, slicked down with pomade, and I decided that shoving around one of the temporarily abondoned and empty farm wagons would be fun. Our wagon of choice, like some others, was parked at a right angle to the sidewalk in front of Mindelheim's major hardware-housewares store, immediately to the left of Jakob Fries' house. We intended to turn the wagon around and push it along the isles between wagons parked facing east and those facing west.

The front of the long shaft of the wagon rested on the ground, wedged against the curb. Adolf struggled to lift the shaft; he succeeded. "Push!" he shouted and push I did as hard as I could, with both hands and straining my legs against the ground. The wagon moved. Adolf tried, but couldn't turn the shaft fast enough. CRACK! *Du lieber Himmel*! The shaft happened to be exactly long enough to reach across the sidewalk and bump the big store window with its iron tip. A small, neat hole stared at us from the middle of the pane and, from this void, cracks radiated to all corners and sides. Adolf dropped the shaft where it was and we flew, he to his house down the street and I two doors to the right from the disaster and up the stairs to our flat. We did not stop to look whether any of the dishes and glasses in the window had been broken.

In Mindelheim news spread instantly, six decades before cell phones. I quietly waited in my room for the inevitable licking. My father was at the store that day, not selling out in the country; he was home in minutes. He swept in the door. I closed my eyes and was ready for the punishment. Nothing, just a stern lecture. I was stunned and relieved, but wondered why. I was saved a hot rear because the owner of the store whose window we had cracked was one of the vociferous Nazis of Mindelheim. *Schadenfreude* (gloating, with a twist of the stiletto, at someone else's misfortune) softened my father's anger. But, he was seriously worried about what the Nazi and his friends would do to us, the only Jewish family in town. Much to his relief, nothing happened other than my parents having to pay half of the cost of replacing the pane, which is what they expected. A close escape.

A simple boys' prank in the Mindelheim of the 1930s wasn't so simple when the perpetrator was a Jewish boy and the victim a Nazi.

The Marktplatz was our favorite playground even when it was empty, especially Jakob's, Hanns' and mine. It was an inviting open space for playing soccer. Officer Schultze, whatever his real name may have been, of beer paunch, drooping jowls, white hair, and an officious manner inside his blue uniform, chased us away whenever we played soccer. He never told us it was against some local law, he just took it as his duty to keep things sedate in the center of his little universe, since he had little else to keep boredom at bay. After his grumble, he retreated to his cubicle in the Rathaus and we again took over the Marktplatz; after all, it wasn't doing anything else.

The Marienbrunnen, the Holy Mary's fountain, beckoned near the street side of the plaza. At its center, on a columnar pedestal, towered and still towers a stone sculpture of Mary, golden scepter in one hand and a golden crown on her head.

Water in a multi-sided ring, several feet wide and may be 20 feet in diameter, washes the base of the column. A spiked wrought iron fence tops the stone wall that rings the moat. On summer days, logic and heat dictated that we boys should cool off in the fresh, cool water splashing out of the plain feeder pipes, a strictly verboten romp. I suppose it was disrespectful of the stone Holy Mary. No sign said the equivalent of "Keep out"; still, we knew the rule. But, heat fired temptation and we jumped and splashed until one of us spied Officer Schultze; then we scrambled. The next day, if the hot weather lasted that long, we were back again, to cool off and tease the man of law.

One time, we were so caught up in our splashing fun that none of us noticed the man of law sneaking up on us. *Rauss*!! (Out!!) As we took off, a corner of my play shorts caught on one of the spikes of the fence. I had to explain the irreparable tear to my mother. As expected, she berated me, but the consequences could not have been too serious, because we were back in the fountain by the next heat wave. My parents seemed to know when to be strict and when to let a boy be just that.

Nooks, crannies and alleys spiderwebbed through our medieval neighborhood. We boys knew them all. Some of the buildings touched each other; between others a narrow space let us run through. These slits, some of them closed street-side by wrought iron fences several feet high, led to courtyards, to other streets, or to cross alleys. They were perfect for hiding. Being kind and generous, we, any two or three or four of us, would allow a younger kid, often the younger brother of Hanns Kramer to find us. Hard as he tried, he rarely succeeded. There were too many of these alleys; he could not clamber over the fences, but he could cry. A candy or Pfenning or two consoled him and the next day he would succumb to our coaxing once more.

Another of our games inveigled the dignified town pharmacist, the owner of the Marienapotheke. The then and now pretty, pale yellow building decorates the corner of the Markplatz, now Marienplatz, and of the Maximilianstrasse, opposite the Rathaus. Rows and rows of covered glass and porcelain jars engraved with the strange names of botanicals and chemicals nudged each other on open oak shelves or were secured in glass-fronted cabinets from near the floor up to the ceiling. It was a mysterious place, neat, spotless and inviting. We boys didn't care about the cures; we were interested in the fancy bulbous glass jars full of colorful candy on the counter between the pharmacist and his customers.

Candy money was not plentiful for any of us, but one or another of us usually carried a Pfennig or even five. We were around seven or eight, may be nine years old. The victim again was Hanns' little brother or some other gullible boy, never a girl. We did not play with girls; I don't even remember any girls, other than Jakob Fries' sister, the one whose secret we couldn't spy through the key hole. We seemed to live in a girl-free town. At any rate, we gave him a few Pfennig and told him to buy some *Haumiblau* at the pharmacy. The little guy promptly disappeared behind the carved door, inset with artistically etched glass that admitted light, and emerged in a minute or two, a fist around the coins, tears on his cheeks, and no candy in his other hand. He was too young to know what he had repeated: *Haumiblau*, said slowly, separates into *hau mi blau*, beat me blue in our Swabian dialect. Once in a while, the pharmacist felt sorry for our victim and gave him some candy - after all, our parents were his customers - and then we all shared it. The pharmacist either did not try to shame us out of the game, or I don't remember that he did. Maybe we were the only entertainment in town.

When the *haumiblau* routine had worn out with one of our little saps, we induced him to buy some *Ibidum* (I bi dum; *eebeedoom*), I am dumb. The result was the same. I have no idea who thought up these dirty fun tricks, but we sure gloried in them.

Hanns' father didn't just sell meat; he was vertically integrated. He bought the cattle, killed it, cut up the carcass and sold it in the spotless shop in front, facing the Maximilianstrasse. All important stores, at least those important to us boys, fronted on this, the main street. Around the corner, on a narrow side street, Jakob and I watch as farmers prod their steers, their cows and hogs down a ramp attached to the rear of horse-drawn cattle wagons and urge them through a wide door into the concrete-floored and tile-walled abbattoir in back of the store. The odor of fresh blood and guts in that cavernous space is not exactly enticing, especially on this warm summer's day, but curiosity diverts our noses. The tail of the bovine is just inside the door, the animal still held by a tether around its neck, as we crane our skinny necks around the door post. The butcher firmly grabs hold of a massive iron cylinder, about eight or nine inches long and flared at the ends. He raises it and, with his left fist presses it against the forehead of the unknowing animal, half way between the eyes. Now, Hanns' father raises a short-handled sledge hammer with his right hand and slams it on the cylinder. The victim's legs crumple; it slumps to the floor and we turn and run. We have no stomach for the gory details sure to follow.

If we had five or ten Pfennig, we turned in at the front door. We paid little attention to the hunks of meat suspended from hooks and sausages draped over racks, ready for customers. We were after sauerkraut. How much we asked for depended on our riches. A lady lifted the lid of the barrel of sauerkraut behind the counter, clamped a handful or two between tongs and set the little stringy pile of fragrant, tender, perky, but not stunningly sour kraut onto a piece of white parchment paper. She weighed it; we handed her the coins and she handed over our snack. Like good Germans, we ate it right then, by hand, without bread. I have liked this indelicate delicacy ever since. Candy was bad for the teeth; ice cream was an expensive and rare treat; sauerkraut was cheap, tasty and harmless.

Then, as now, kids were addicted to wheels, anything that moved on wheels, in the house and out of doors. As an only child, I had big wheels and little wheels and those in between. My friends and I played with my Mærklin train set with straight, curved and figure eight tracks hooked together into a rail system with a station, a tunnel and more, all spread out on the bare harwood floor in the back right-hand quarter of the formal living room. On rainy days, we steamed to imaginary places at fantastic speeds. My train was not electric, plug in and run. The engine had to be wound with a key; but, so what? We enjoyed ourselves and knew nothing else.

My first personal vehicle, after the baby buggy and stroller, was a Hollænder. Four spoked wheels, each about a foot in diameter and with solid rubber tires, were attached to a metal frame topped with a wooden seat. A shaft that ended in a handlebar protruded through a slit from somewhere below, I suppose from some sort of ratchet that engaged a spoked wheel attached to the front axle. A pull back, a push forth on the handlebar and, presto, the Hollænder and I glided forward. My feet rested on a pad on the swivel front axel and did the steering. Lots of fun and a great exerciser for the arms and chest, not unlike some popular stationary sweat machines in modern athletic clubs. The Hollænder carried me on the sidewalks up and down Maximilianstrasse as I worked up an appetite for the next meal. Everybody seemed to recognize me and smiled and most had a nice word for me as I rolled by, nosing about town.

A racy wooden scooter with red metal wheels and solid rubber tires I received for a birthday shoved the Hollænder into the background. The scooter was faster and more maneuverable to flit between people with whom I had to share the sidewalk. One time, I flitted faster than I was looking and ran into an elderly lady. She, of course, was startled, mad, but unhurt and paid no attention whatever to my worried apologies. The next day, my lapse was news in the *Mindelheimer Zeitung*, the local purveyor of important news. "*Der Lausbub* [rascal] Werner Liebschütz..." it started and went on to tell of my transgression. My earliest 15 minutes of fame. Did I achieve this notoriety because Mindelheim depended on me for entertainment, or was it because I was a Jewish kid, the only one in town? The year likely was 1934, a year or so after Hitler came to power. Either way, my family was not amused.

When I was seven, I graduated to the dream of most boys, a bicycle. Seven must have been the magic age for bicycle birthdays, because all of us friends were truly big wheels at about the same time. Adept at learning to ride I was not. Just the idea that I might fall down seemed to throw me off balance. Gradually, with my father's urging and encouraging help, I learned to climb on the bike and wobble along. Before too long, I no longer needed my dad's help; a wall was enough of a stabilizer to hold me vertical until I got rolling. Once my confidence had bloomed and a skinned knee no longer was a discouraging danger, I practically lived on that bike of mine when neither school nor homework interfered. Chores I had none, other than shining my shoes.

Once all of us friends were mounted, we explored in and around the city, played tag and generally rode as fast as our legs would pump. One time, a pile of sand suddenly popped up in front of me. The bike stopped, I did not and went flying over the handlebars. I limped home, pushing my bike and now and then dabbing my bloody knee with my cotton handkerchief. Whoever was at home - someone always was home - dabbed biting tincture of iodine on the hurt and wound a cotton gauze bandage around my throbbing knee. This was a real bandage, not a handy self sticker. When my "nurse", as often as not, the maid, had layered enough gauze around my knee, she cut a foot or so lengthwise and then wound these ends in opposite directions and tied them just tight enough to hold the bandage in place. A day or two grounded with a stiff joint, then back into the saddle. We boys had a fabulous time in our little town.

The railroad station, a little way beyond the city wall, was a magnet for us. We watched the rumbling and hissing black steam engines with their snakes of cars rush by, not even slowing, because Mindelheim was too small for the express to stop. When a local stopped, we checked who got on, who got off, what was loaded, what was unloaded. We were not hard to entertain; the world entertained us just by being there.

Toward the station, on the left, a beer garden invited us to linger, not to have a beer, but to watch men bowl, shaded by huge chestnut trees that provided a green firmament for rows upon rows of long wooden tables and benches where working-class families gathered on summery evenings and weekends to savor beer, sausage and potato salad. These bowling alleys truly were alleys: a set of thick, wide, parallel boards for the bottom and a vertical one on each side to keep the ball from rolling off the lane. To one side was a narrow, slightly inclined chute for returning the ball by whoever was stuck out of sight, behind the plain wooden pins. When we hung around long enough and the day was hot, some of the men would let us have a sip of beer. After that, we did not need to be told to scram.

In fall, the chestnut trees provided great ammunition. The shiny brown nuts, extracted from their green spiny hull, would fly through the air, as we flung them at each other, usually missing and just occasionally hitting a passerby who happened to round the corner at the wrong time. A yell of protest, an *Entschuldigung, bitte* - excuse us, please, from us and on we fired these fruit of fall.

The fresh nuts were soft enough to grub a hole through the center with a screwdriver. Then, we threaded a string through a half dozen chestnuts - a necklace had been created. In Mindelheim, fun even grew on trees. Chestnuts always left their mark on our hands. Breaking the hull released sap that turned brown and stained our fingers and kept them stained until the last of the old skin finally had shed at the end of the chestnut season.

A little further out than the bowling tavern we dropped in at the town's cemetery, not to mourn, but to play.

The rows upon rows of large and elaborate monuments and mausoleums engraved, emblazoned or topped with religious figures and symbols were ideal for our games of hide-and-seek. The boy who was the "it" had to crouch low, eyes closed, behind one of the vertical slabs of marble or granite and count to ten while the rest of us scattered and hid behind some others. Sneaking back to the "safe place" was easy in summer, when we went barefoot, but when we were shod, the soles grated on the gravel and the "it" had a better chance of calling us out before we could reach the "it" grave stone. We tried to not trample on the graves that fronted the markers; we just hid behind them. Still, the caretaker chased us out when he happened to be around and saw us run among the dead. He did not bother us when we respectfully stared at a corps lying in state in a miniature chapel with a barred window in front. I still can see a little old lady, all dressed up, gray-haired, face wrinkled, eyes closed, almost lost in her coffin lined with a white blanket, and surrounded by a mass of flowers in vases and pots. We did not read the paper; we did not know who was born to whom, but we often knew who had died, because one of us either recognized the face of the one lying there so still or we read the name on the card propped up on the inside of the window.

Were we just being curious, did we enjoy the macabre, or was it just a fine place to play? Probably a bit of each. I suspect that having played among the dead, buried and not quite yet, when I was young, still draws me to cemeteries, from simple burial plots in the California Gold Country to *La Recoleta*, the fascinating city of the dead in Buenos Aires.

There were no playgrounds for kids; all of Mindelheim was ours.

School days

Starting out

Whether we liked it or not, we friends did have to interrupt our games to sit in school.

Kindergarten had introduced me to confinement. With no public kindergartens in

Mindelheim, my parents entrusted me to one run by nuns at their convent in an old, long grayish-tan building, two or three stories high, with a line of small windows, like pearls on a string, looking across the street and to the Mindel where it skirted town. Since I apparently could stand some reining in, a few hours of close supervision by ladies in habits each week day must have been what my parents thought I needed. Maybe my mother figured better half a day of nun-inspired discipline now would be better than having me under their gaze every waking hour, as she had been forced to endure as a young school girl. My nuns were not frighteningly strict; I liked them. What I learned in kindergarten is behind the impenetrable curtain of time. All I recall is the pleasant stroll, my hand in my mother's, to and from the convent along the tree-lined quai of the fenced-in Mindel, shimmering in the morning light or gliding darkly under winter fog or clouds.

Attending a Catholic school was nothing new in our family. All of my father's sisters had been schooled by nuns rather than in the local public girl's school. My grandparents did not want their daughters just to be educated, but also to become young ladies, which seemed more likely under the tutelage and watchful eyes of immaculate women than the public girls' school.

Real school started the spring after my birthday, when I was six and a half.

Just as in the generation of my elders, boys and girls attended single-sex schools. The two were not even adjacent; one was on one end of town, the other one at the other end; just could not trust those kids to pay attention to the teacher with the other sex swarming around. The public boy's school, my school, squatted in the new part of Mindelheim, outside the medieval confines. It was a plain, rectangular three story brick edifice fronted by a generously wide flight of steps and backed by a grassy athletic field, outlined with a row of pines.

On my first day of school I wear a dark coat, a beret well back on my head to show my curly black hair, long knit stockings, lace shoes and on my back I carry a box-shaped leather backback, a *Tornister*, with leather straps. On the picture in front of me, I look appropriately serious for this important day.

Day one of my two long decades as a student started out strangely, forebodingly, way over my understanding. All of us boys from all elementary grades and our parents assembled in the plaza in front of the school to hear the rector's welcoming speech, delivered from the top rung of the steps that led up to the front door. This year, he said something extraordinary, something that took guts in 1935, two years into the promised Nazi 1,000-year Reich. He declared, almost shouted: "We now have a Jewish child in our midst. I do not expect any incidents. I do not expect any harassment. But should there be any, the perpetrators will be punished severely."

Since we, the Liebschütz family, were the only Jews, and I was the only Jewish child in all of Mindelheim, he obviously spoke about me, a six-and-a-half-year-old boy. The signficance of those words was lost on me at that time, but they must have been believed: No one troubled me, by word or deed, at the Mindelheimer Volksschule because I was Jewish.

My backpack that first day held only a slate board and decorated *Griffelschachtel*, a little wooden box with a sliding lid in which first graders carried their slate styluses. These were fragile and easily would have broken into pieces if they had been allowed to rattle around loose in the bottom of a backpack. I carried no snack or lunch. There was no time allowed for snacks, and, since school for us junior kids ended at about noon, we were at home for the big meal of the day, the Mittagessen.

By eight in the morning, we sit in our assigned seats. The door opens, Herr Weiss, tall and slim, at least tall compared to us first-graders, strides in. "*Steht auf!*" We snap to and stand erect, next to our desks. He nods and we sit down. The lesson begins. To talk to ones neighbor was strictly verboten; holding the *Griffel* correctly was important, no pointy knuckle sticking up; if it stuck up, it came down quickly when Herr Weiss' ruler, an extension of this cold schoolmaster, slapped it down. After the first few times, just his glance would straighten the index finger. But, if he snuck up from behind our backs to examine our progress, the knuckle would suffer and eventually remember for the rest of time. Is that how I learned to write fast, but sloppily?

We wrote with slate on slate in first grade. The gray-black leaf of rock, ground smoooth, about the size of a sheet of office paper, was fortified against breakage by a wooden frame about an inch wide. One side of the slate was plain to accomodate arithmetic or drawing, the other side was engraved with parallel red lines to help our writing stay on course. The meeting of stylus and slate board could be a torture for the ears, especially Herr Weiss'. Too steep an angle, and a sharp squeal would penetrate the skull; too low an angle, and the line was weak. That is where the knuckle discipline paid off: Too much knuckle equalled too steep an angle equalled a squeal equalled a lowered grade in orthography.

We learned the three Rs, that I know; what else, other than sitting still and *Hochdeutsch*, formal German, I don't. Children and most adults in Mindelheim conversed in Schwæbisch, the dialect of southern Bavaria. It is guttural, rural, expressive, disdained by the intelligentsia, and totally foreign to northern Germans, especially Prussians. To Swabians, most of them Catholics, Prussians were strangers, stiff, humorless, arrogant, and Protestant besides. They were the "*Sche-us Pre-us*", code for *scheiss Preussen*, shit Prussians. We Swabians weren't about to speak their language unless we had to, but in school we had to. High German is the equivalent of the King's English, the language of the educated, of commerce, of the arts and sciences.

All my adult relatives spoke High German with a Swabian accent, with dialect thrown in for emphasis. If we boys, my cousins and I, dipped too deeply into Schwæbisch: "Don't talk like a ditchdigger!" pulled us back to more middle-class lingo, for a while.

Homework pinched play every weekday, right from day one; real homework, not just fun-and-games work. My parents expected me to do well and I did. Undoubtedly, just like most other kids, I had to be reminded to do my homework when I much rather would have been outside with my friends than at a table practicing my letters and adding numbers. But the rule *Zuerst die Arbeit, dann das Spiel* - First work, then games, gradually became and then stayed part of my life, possibly too much so.

Only one memorable disappointment marred school in Mindelheim, a devastating day in first grade. The day's lessons on October 16 started, and nothing; the lessons on October 16 ended, and still nothing, nothing at all. No one wished me happy birthday, not Herr Weiss, not any boy, not the entire class. I was crestfallen. I knew my birthday was important; after all, I got hugs and kisses, presents and a cake at home, but, at school, no one had paid the slightest attention to this, my very own holiday. Very very disappointing. At home I was the center of attention; at school, I was just another boy among thirty or so other boys, every one of whom had a birthday. That's what my mother explained to me when I told her about my disillusionment. I understood, but didn't really want to.

Strange baggage

We hung our coats on hooks out in the hall, next to the class room. I had a loden coat, from our store, of course. It was an expensive coat of densely woven wool that shed rain almost like the back of a duck. Mine, like most such coats, was a dusky brownish green with a silken surface sheen. One day, at the end of school, I grabbed my coat, the only one left, put it on, and headed for home. Less than half way there, I put my cold hands into my pockets. I felt something strange, something hard and something soft, things that I had not stuffed in there. I pulled out the two strangers, a belt and a red cotton handkerchief. Somebody must have shoved these things into my coat pocket. My coat was beltless and my handkerchief was blue, not red, and was in my right pants pocket; these things obviously were not mine. I had no idea whose, but certainly not mine. Why should I want to or need to carry them home? At the next drainage culvert by the curb of the sidewalk, I dumped this foreign belt and hankie down a gap of the grate that covered the culvert. Now, my coat again was fully mine.

One glance from my mother: "That's not your coat! Where is yours?" "No? Not mine?" I was dumbfounded. I explained it was the only one left and that they all looked alike. Of course, my mother had written my name into mine before the first day I wore it, but who, other than mothers, paid attention to such detail?

In the meantime, the other boy's mother had seen "Liebschütz" in her son's coat and, in less than a half hour, she was at our flat, her son in tow. Everyone knew where we lived. She looked at the coat, stuck a hand in one pocket and then into the other on: "Where is the belt and the handkerchief?" I confessed. I remembered the culvert I had fed. My mother hustled me along as we and they, whoever the theys were, headed for the culvert. I peaked down. Relief! A finer grate below the opening had caught the belt and handkerchief; they had not fallen into oblivion. I reached down, but my arm was too short. My mother kneeled on the pavement, stretched down, retrieved the discards, handed them to the aggrieved party, apologized for me, and hurried me home under an icy cloud. As all my transgressions, this one was followed by a lecture. I was supposed to have learned something, maybe "Think first, then act."

Portentious visitors

One day, in 1937 or 1938, my father appeared in the class room in the middle of a lesson one afternoon. Unheard of! I was to come home with him immediately. What was up? As we hurried home, on foot, he explained that important visitors were waiting - Uncle Victor, cousin to my father, and Aunt Martha Bollag from Zurich. They had to be important; only death or serious illness would spring one from classes during the school day. This was not the time to ask how come no one had told me that they were to stop in Mindelheim on their drive back from Munich to Switzerland. They obviously were not staying long, else they could have met me at the end of the school day. I was my usual cheerful self, dutifully answered the kind of questions, mainly about school, adults feel obliged to ask kids as they pat their heads. Uncle Victor seemed tall to me, was partly bald and had a relaxed smile. Aunt Martha was short, not much taller than I, with wavy to curly hair riding above an artificial smile.

I had never seen my family so deferential, so overly eager to please. After the obligatory coffee, tea, cake and small talk, the adults adjourned to our formal living room and I was relegated to play in my room, far from the sound of voices. What was going on with all that secrecy? I had no clue. Only much later I realized that the Nazi hate machine that daily vilified us Jews as Germany's, as the world's, incomparable menace must have started to worry my elders. Emigration, safety, at least mine, must have been the secret topic. At that time, I was told nothing and suspected nothing of the sort.

That brief visit introduced me to the Bollags whose attitudes and actions, just a year or two later, helped shape my years in Switzerland and sharpen some of my perceptions of people and their deeds.

A *Giggele* of rye

First grade was snackless in the morning and classless in the afternoon. As soon as I arrived home from school, a little after noon, I had to change from my neat school clothes to slightly less neat play clothes, wash my hands and face to be ready for the Mittagessen whose aroma greeted me as I waited impatiently until someone came to open the door for me at the top of the stairs. Some foods I disliked, like fibrous kohlrabi and overweaning celeriac. Like them or or not, I had to eat what was on my plate. Making a fuss over food rarely entered my mind and getting away with it, no way. My family was well acquainted with the principles of positive and negative reinforcement, especially negative, long before pop psychologists popularized these phrases, or, likely, even before they had been coined.

As the school day lengthened, from the second grade on, the Mittagessen became a pause between morning and afternoon sessions. The bell of freedom had barely faded - off to home for a change of clothes and my favorite snack, the *Giggele* of a loaf bread, as it was, unadorned by anything. The *Giggele,* with a hard initial g, is nothing but the heel of a loaf of bread shaped by a skilled hand, not by a bread pan. I rather had that richly flavored, crusty German rye bread for an after-school snack than anything else, even cookies. That bread embodied the wisdom of *"Ein gesunder Zahn kaut Brot zu Marzipan",* literally, a sound tooth chews bread into almond paste, that sweet luxurious ingredient of fines cakes and cookies and the "flesh" of sometimes garishly colored marzipan fruits, piglets and other creatures. Since my mother had insisted that I thoroughly chew food, whatever it was, I had no trouble reaching the sweet nirvana with rye bread.

"Why didn't anybody in school know what a *Giggele* is? I told them at lunch that the *Giggele* was the prize piece of bread at home, but nobody knew what I was talking about. How come?" Our older daughter, then in junior high school, couldn't figure out why the these kids were so ignorant. She had no idea that *Giggele* was not English, that it was Swabian dialect and that heel of the bread was the English equivalent. The concise Swabian word with a humorous feel had emigrated with me and smoothly transferred into our family lingo decades later. After this embarassment to the teenage mind, our bread became bilingual.

In fall and early winter, my snack was apple and rye. A bite of one and a bite of the other, chewed together, delicious. These were not like the starchy, faint-of-flavor apples that now dominate bins and shelves in supermarkets. These were apples that called attention to themselves if only one or two sat on the counter in the kitchen, so seductive was their aroma. Now, we drive an hour into the upper foothills of the Sierra Nevada where such intensely flavorful apples still are offered by a few devoted and skilled orchardists. Just like those I enjoyed as a schoolboy, these mountain apples do not look perfect; a few hail spots, another imperfection here or there, but who cares? It's the flavor that counts.

Raw, crisp carrots were another treat. I always was eager to trot along when one of my parents or our maid took me to the vegetable farmer beyond the edge of town. Carrots, kohlrabi, savoy cabbage, big black spherical radishes and other vegetables and greens were freshly harvested each day, summer to fall, until the ground froze hard, to fill the baskets and bags carried along by the customers. One of the owners of the farm, usually the lady, always handed me a big just-dug carrot as a treat. If there was no water handy to wash it, I had no patience to wait till we reached home; I rubbed off the dirt with my hands the best I could, transferred the rest to my pants, and started chomping. A bit gritty, but delicious. My mother disapproved; she believed in "Cleanliness is next to godliness". My father thought it was OK. He relied on the laissez-faire: "One has to eat six pounds of dirt a year to stay healthy; whether one eats it gradually, or all at once, makes no difference". He must have been right; earthy carrots from Mindelheim never sickened me.

Ah, those big black radish globes! My father sliced them translucently thin, but not all the way through, so they opened like an accordion, pure white circles with a black rim. He then unfolded them, sprinkled salt on the segments, closed them and set each radish on end. In about ten mintues, the salt had extracted radish tears and a puddle of salt water had collected under each bulbous root. By mealtime, the radishes were juicy and mild as each one of us at the table pulled off a few slices to savor the perky flavor. I particularly liked a few slices between two layers of rye bread. Delicious, again.

An alphabet of illnesses

I was not a sickly youngster, but the common childhood illnesses that floated about at the time all landed on me: colds, diptheria, measles, mumps, pneumonia in both lungs, rickets and tonsilitis. The siege started around the time I started kindergarten and had faded a few years later. I suppose I inherited sturdy genes, since I survived them all, not a certainty in the 1930s, long before antibiotics and other wondrous medicines.

Which treatments were supposed to alleviate which disease is lost, but I do recall the tortures and one pleasure.

Torture it was when my mother wrapped my chest and back in double-sheets of yellow parchment paper with some hot filling between the layers. Whatever it was, it supposedly helped cure what ailed me. Why I recall it as a big fish, I have no idea; may be it smelled like an old fish. Anyway, the whole assembly itched like hell. Whether the itching was from the cure or the disease was irrelevant, I was miserable and shared the misery with anyone who came near, my parents, maid, Aunt Erna or grandmother. I'm sure they were at least as happy as I was when I was rambunctious on the Marktplatz rather than pesky in bed.

The pleasure also was wrapped around my chest and back. This time, the stuffing was hot, cooked crushed-to-mashed potatoes. What an enticing aroma! How could I resist it? I groped between the layers of parchment, covered with cloths to trap the heat, grubbed out and ate all the potato mash I could reach. This round, it was my mother's turn to complain. I had eaten the source of heat and the maid had to boil and squash more potatoes. May be the heat helped, but it was the potatoes in my stomach that made me content.

The mumps were one big itch in my swollen jaws. Was the itch from the disease or from some presumed cure that was tied around my chin and covered my cheeks with beads of sweat? I felt lousy, feverish and sorry for myself. Why did I have to be sick so much? Why was I always being wrapped in parchment paper? May be the supposed cures were left-overs from the ancient Egyptians.

Measles, then a common scourge of childhood, intruded at a very wrong time and place. My mother and I were visiting Aunt Lilian, my mother's sister, and Uncle Georg in Schwandorf during Easter vacation. A day or two of play passed, then a red spot here and a red spot there; one more day, and I was polka dotted red and out of sorts, feverish, itching, confined to a dimmed room suffused with a reddish glow. Were the windows covered with red curtains or were my feverish eyes seeing red? I was lovingly pampered with puddings for the inside and salves and poultices on the outside, but my vacation had been ruined. I recovered just in time to miss no school. Such rotten luck!

Parades and lessons out of school

I had my private grandstand from where I saw the world march by on the Maximilianstrasse, just beyond the Marktplatz below. Nothing blocked my view out the window of our dining room as religious processions flowed or soldiers and Nazi storm troopers stomped and strutted by.

The caravan of the Catholic faithful drifted like a broad river, slowly, stately. Clergy in colorful or white robes and, to me, funny hats, surrounded a statue of the Madonna, or some other other saintly figure, as it swayed on a large stretcher being carried by an array of strong men on each side. The lead priests in the parade swung censers rythmically to and fro; smoke drifted out of the filigreed pores and then dissipated in the moving air; other priests carried crosses, some plain, some adorned with Jesus in agony; still others signed the shape of a cross with their arms and hands, blessing the respectfully quiet crowd that lined the Maximilianstrasse on both sides and which responded with the same sign, close to their chests, as the effigy of the Holy Mary floated by. Others in the procession, including children, carried religious banners that fluttered in the breeze and enlivened the festive spectacle.

The military parades were exciting not only for the enthusiastic masses lining the street but also for me as I craned my neck at our window to see steel-helmeted goose steppers hoisting the new German flag, the swastika, which led led the parade. Rank upon rank of soldiers with rifles shouldered and bayonets slung from their belts stomped behind this flag of hate. Smaller banners with insignia identified each squadron of perfectly aligned fighters. Wheeled guns pulled by trucks rumbled by and tanks with soft-capped heads sticking out of the turrets rattled on the pavement; the marching band blared *Deutschland über Alles* (Germany above everything), Germany's national anthem. The men and machines of war combined to rush the pulse and raise the hands of the crowd in the stiff-armed Hitler salute, to fire the men, women and children to bellow *Heil Hitler* in unison, again and again until the last soldiers had passed - and to concern my parents. I lapped up the spectacle.

The windows of our flat stayed closed when the Nazi Brown Shirts, the SA (*Sturmabteilung*; storm troopers) and the black-hatted and black-uniformed SS (*Schutzstaffel*; guard detachment) strutted in double- time down the street. It was the SA gang of cowards who had intimidated, harassed, beat up and murdered opposition candidates so Hitler could win the election in 1933. It was the SS toughs who would become Hitler's chief butchers later on. I was not allowed to even stick my nose outside during these parades; I watched from gaps between the curtains.

The parade frenzy reached its apogee in March of 1938 during the *Anschluss*, the pre-arranged annexation of Austria, Hitler's poisonous nest. Pumped-up throngs, townspeople and farmers from around Mindelheim, lined both sides of the Maximilianstrasse, arms stretched in the Nazi salute, as weaponry rattled on the pavement, and soldiers, storm troopers and brown shirts blustered by, their shiny black boots arching high in the dictatorial goose step. *Deutschland über Alles* and the rabble-rousing Horst Wessel song shook the air between shouts of *Heil Hitler!* It was a mighty, triumphal parade for our little town. I, at not yet10, was the only one in the family who was not one bit worried. This was to be the last parade I watched in Germany. I still have an aversion to parades, any kind of parade. They inflate brainless emotion. (Horst Wessel, the composer and writer of the song, was an early and fanatic Nazi who was murdered and thereby martyred by some Communists in 1930.)

I can't help but wonder why these frenzied displays and vicious Jew-baiting cartoons in newspapers and as posters on kiosks did not shake my father's faith that his heroism in World War I would blunt the Nazi's sword.

Lederhosen and warm weather were as one ever since I had tried on my first pair when I was about five. They meant license to get pants dirty, freedom from tears, snags or nagging. These tough pants, about as long as Bermuda shorts, were my summer uniform as they were and are for many German men and boys. They are assembled from pieces of leather, the cheaper ones, like mine, from cow hide, rough side out. Deer supplied my father's beautiful, supple pair of black-dyed *Lederhosen* embroidered with alpine flowers along both side seams. A big flap, secured with a button on each side, is the fly. The leather suspenders are tethered in front with a wide connector piece. In an oil painting of me at about six, the connector is decorated with cut-outs of stylized flowers; their petals and centers are white, blue or red, depending on which colored fabric peers through the slits and circles. Bærbel Sittler, Aunt Erna's best friend, hid this painting during the Nazi persecutions and then gave it to her after the death of the Hitler regime, when she visited Mindelheim. Without the selfless dedication of Fræulein Sittler, this reminder of my childhood would not now be the focus of a wall in our home.

Cowhide *Lederhosen* are stiff when new and have to be properly conditioned by wear and dirt. I could not accelerate wear; wearing them from near sunrise to bedtime was all the time there was, but I could help along with dirt. By neat coincidence, I received a new pair just days before crews started repaving the Marktplatz. What better way to speed conditioning than by sitting in tar? The rear took care of itself, the front I had to smear with my hands. Thorough as I was, these originally light gray shorts now were mostly black and nearly rigid. I had paved them. My mother exploded: "*Wie dum kannscht Du sei*?!" How stupid can you get?! A new pair of *Lederhosen* ruined, good only for the rubbish can. I do not recall the pennance I suffered, but I never again sat in tar. Still, a whiff of tar in the air is a perfume that carries me back to those fun-filled boy days, occasionally interruped by a pulled ear or hot rear.

Beer, the national drink of Bavaria, was at home in our home. Wine would grace the table on Jewish holidays and other special occasions. A bottle of Kirsch was in the pantry to be poured over puddings or a slightly aged cake. No one fussed over these pleasures of life and no one in my family ever was even close to drunk. It would have been unseemly, below family dignity. In my innocence, I was totally unprepared when I spotted a drunk, face flushed, eyes vacant, hair a gucky mess, clothes dirty, sprawled against the wall along the sidewalk just this side of our store, the side toward home. How disgusting! I had never seen a drunk. I stared at him but hugged the curb as I passed by him. He, that poor slob, decades beyond his troubles, still pops in front of my eyes when I see a drunk.

A little beyond where the drunk sprawled that day, toward the Obere Tor, a wide archway led to the courtyard of the building that housed the *Mindelheimer Zeitung,* the paper that had called me a *Lausbub* when I ran into a lady with my scooter. I knew that little black delivery vans often came zipping out of that archway, across the sidewalk, into the Maximilianstrasse. This one time, I didn't pay attention. The van zipped, I jumped off my scooter, the scooter ended under the van and I just on the safe side of the wheels. The driver jumped out of the cab, rushed to my side, looked me over, exhaled a sigh of relief when he saw me intact, turned and rushed on his way. I picked up my unscathed scooter and camly glided along. I kept quiet about this near scrape; after all, nothing had happened and I likely would be blamed for being careless. There was no point in telling my folks. In the meantime, a busybody customer had seen the near hit and ratted on me. Sure enough, I was dressed down for not watching out, for always being in a hurry. What about the driver? Shouldn't he have been more careful? But, talking back to my grandmother and mother? No way. Timeless: If it's a kid vs. an adult, the kid is the guilty one.

Even ice cream got me into trouble. It was a rare sweet treat, a once-or-twice-a-summer luxury. I never even had heard of a refrigerator; we didn't even have an icebox, just the cool cellar. Since we had no place to keep ice cream frozen, we either had to lick the delicious dollops on a cone right away or bring our own container and then quickly carry them home, to friends, or to a near-by picnic. This was the ancient age, before Tupperware or other plastic wonders.

One fine warm day, my mother and I were to stroll to the outskirts of town, up toward the turreted Frundsberg Castle, the ancient seat of the chivalrous protector of Mindelheim. The rest-stop treat was to be ice cream and stories. Mother gave me some money and a rectangular aluminum box set in a heavy cloth bag, for insulation. This box was special; nine vertical grooves lined the long sides and two removable dividers allowed for three compartments of any desired size. My mother told me to run ahead to the bakery on Maximilianstrasse, where ice cream was a side line, and buy two scoops, one for her one for me. The flavors were my choice. When I saw the colors of the ice cream, pink for strawberry, yellow for vanilla, brown for chocolate, purple for blackberry, I looked at my box; I looked at the amount of money in my hand. I had more then the price of two scoops and the box easily held four. Ice cream being rare, I couldn't just buy two scoops and leave most of the box empty. I decided to buy four, one of each color, just the right quantity to slip under the amount of money I carried. In the meantime, my mother had come and waited for me outside the bakery. I had figured we'd be on our way as soon as I sidled up next to her. Then, once we sat on the grass, up on the hill, we'd have to eat the ice cream, all four scoops, with at least two for me.
"What about the change?"

I handed her a few Pfennig.
"But, I gave you 3 Mark (or however much it was), where is the rest?"
I started to sweat.
"Open the box!"
She saw and she yelled. I had violated her trust; I had wasted money and I wasn't about to have any ice cream, or an outing. She marched me home, my ears hot, my cheeks wet, another lesson learned, the hard way. Who ate all that ice cream before it melted? I got none.

That aluminum box has a special mystique for me. When I escaped Nazi danger several years later, my mother packed it full of whatever, along with much else. In Switzerland, that box carried potato salad on school trips; it came with me to the United States and then on to California with Joan and me. When we replaced it with neat plastic boxes, I relegated it to the garage to hold oil squirt cans on a shelf until it started to leak the drippings. I still couldn't let it go; I degreased it and now it safely keeps road flares in the trunk of our car. This plain aluminum box of long ago and now, memory and memorial.

The trouble that beset me in the large, beautiful orchard and meadow that belonged to friends of my parents was my doing, mine alone. That Sunday, when I was about five, the friends had invited us to a picnic lunch, may be a half hour's walk from our flat. A little creek meandered through the rolling orchard, planted to apples, pears and prune plums. Plums were ripe. These were the Italian type, the sweet fruit for delectable *Zwetschgedatsch,* fresh prune pie, with a mound of whipped cream in the center, enough for a moundlet to ride along on top each slice. The adults chatted and I went exploring. The ground was littered with this tempting fruit, sweet and soft; I gorged my self. My parents knew that I could not get lost, because the orchard was fenced and I could not drown because the rivulet was shallow and I no longer a toddler.

Toward mid-afternoon, my pants began to feel very sticky. What to do? I could not just tell my parents, with their friends right there. So I did the necessary. I walked to the brook as normally as possible in my discomfort, far enough to get out of sight of the adults. I pulled down my pants, cleaned my underwear as well as I could manage, and thoroughly washed my hands, as I had been taught. Then, with my wet underwear clinging to my rear, I strolled as non-chalantly as I could down to my parents and their friends and sat down. Their noses all turned to me. I had to explain. Was I ever relieved that they all thought my misadventure was funny, not serious. They even complimented me on how well I had disposed of the evidence. We didn't linger but a few minutes more before we marched home to a bath and fresh clothes.

Fun and trouble were my boyhood twins. *Fasching,* Shrovetide in England and carnival in New Orleans, was a time for merriment and disguises, when pagan tradition met Christian invention, when liberty ruled. My disguise was the full regalia of an Indian chief, Mindelheim version. This six-year old is in long tan pants - the photo is in black and white, but my memory is in color - with a military stripe down the outside seam; a darker, tunic-like shirt with a white stripe around the neck and a buff-colored cuff emblazoned with a black, eight-branched star-burst pattern on a circular patch, reaches down to my hips. The hilt of a rubber knife sticks out of a silvery holster dangling from a white belt cinched around my waist. Around my neck hangs a multi-shaded bead necklace. My greatest pride sits on top, a full-featherd headpiece; white, red, blue and green-dyed feathers stick up from a decorated head band. I stand on the corner of the arched street-level entry to our hose, a satisfied smile on my face.

The smiling canvas is where the trouble shows. I succeeded having my face grease-painted Indian-style: a dark brown eagle on my forehead and crease stripes on cheeks and chin to add age and fierceness. My mother had said NO when I had begged for this painted transformation into a genuine Indian chief; it would be a waste of money. But, Aunt Erna, generous and soft-hearted, was an easy mark. "*Warum ned*?".- Why not? She took me to whoever painted faces and I sat still long enough for this secret evolution. Done, I eagerly showed myself off at our store. My mother audibly frowned: Aunt Erna had interfered, except she hadn't. I had not told her that my mother earlier had nixed my wishes. The dressing down I got from my mother, never from Aunt Erna, was as nothing compared to the exhileration of having been transformed into an Indian chief, even if only for half a day. I hated to wash off that warrior's façade before supper. No way was I to sit at the table looking like a savage. Convention had to be observed.

Our Jewish life

Our formal Jewish life was centered in Memmingen, the nearest town with a large enough Jewish community to support a synagogue. That is where I attended religious school once a week, all too often for me. Lehrer (teacher) Emil Liffgens, insipid, uninspiring, pedantic; what a bore! But, as often in my life, a silver lining ringed the cloud of the inevitable. In fact, there were two shiny rings: I could ride the train from Mindelheim to Memmingen, all by myself, all 30 minutes of it, an adventure for this eight or nine-year old. Then, after the lessons, I ate Mittagessen at the Heilbronners, with my cousins Walter and Hans. These fringe benefits made religious school a bearable depression between two highs.

Lehrer Liffgens droned on about the aleph, bet, .. shin, etc., trying to teach us the Hebrew alphabet and language, me and two or three other equally bored students, including Hans, so we eventually could recite the requisite prayers and Torah portions at our respective Bar Mitzvahs. I was the youngest and struggled with the

Hebrew letters and some simple words. Occasionally, amid the droning and struggling, a shock of brown hair appeared at the open window behind Lehrer Liffgens' back. A few seconds more, and a funny face with tongue sticking out mocked our teacher - it was Walter. He somehow had clambered up to the ledge to entertain us and to annoy our school master. We, of course, could not smother our grins, at Walter and at the rip of temper by our teacher when he spied the source of our merriment. Being outside, Walter easily escaped the grasp of Lehrer Liffgens, but not the mid-day wrath of Uncle Alfred. After the expected licking, Walter would disappoint us, but only for a session or two; we simply were too appreciative an audience and our nemesis too tempting a target.

Lehrer Liffgens was more shadow than person. His eyes lacked sparkle, a smile was rare, his voice was gray, his skin never seemed to have seen the sun, as if he were just another volume on the shelves stacked with his books bound in black, emerging just to bore us.

Harmless and innocent as he, his wife, and child were, they too fell victim to the devouring Nazi rage. Deported. Murderd.

Three of my family's prayer books, two bound in black cloth, two mostly in Hebrew and one a German translation, travelled with me on all of my moves, right here to our living room in Fresno. Two are over 90 years old, with pages less yellow than a newspaper after an hour in the sun. A fourth treasure, from 1888 and a mere 50 pages or so, contains a phrase by phrase translation of major prayers, all arranged in double columns on its pages, one Hebrew, the other in German. These were the prayer books my parents, my grandmother and Aunt Erna held in their hands at home on Friday nights and in the cherished synagogue in Memmingen before its destruction by Nazi goons.

Services at the synagogue did not live up to the beauty of its interior; they were dismal. Squeezed in among the men, having to sit still and be quiet, being too fidgety to fall asleep, not understanding a word of Hebrew nor the long sermon in German, I was bored from head to heart. But, attend I must. In retrospect, it was not a totally empty exercise. I learned to recognize the melodies of some chanted prayers that then accompanied me to the synagogues in Zurich, in Detroit, in Fresno, melodies that provide continuity and transmit beauty musically and emotionally. These melodies are the thread that carried my Judaism from place to place, that kept it intact long before I debated with myself about religion and my attitude and obligation toward Judaism. Belief in the existence of God lost in the debate; modern Judaism, heir to ancient religious belief and tradition, with its moral precepts and the social imperatives it inspires, has remained an anchor for me.

The one chant that I always greeted with relief was the Kaddish, the prayer commemorating the dead. When I heard the cadence *Yisgadal v'yiskadash sh'mai rabbo....* I knew that liberation was only minutes away. Sunshine or rain, out into the fresh air; dusty solemnity remained inside.

The adults, including my four Mindelheimer, my grandmother, my parents, and Aunt Erna lingered to exchange greetings with other congregants. Not caring what the adults were chatting about, I waited impatiently until we finally headed to Uncle-Alfred-and-Aunt-Helene's. There, a festive meal, cooked by the maid, greeted us. Aunt Helene added finishing touches and then we ringed the big table clad in white, Uncle Alfred presiding. He chanted the Motze over the Berches and it finally would be time for that part of Judaism that then most appealed to my innermost being.

On Yom Kippur, the Day of Repentance, the day of fasting, the time for breaking bread arrived ever so slowly. The twenty four hours plus, from late in the afternoon on Erev Yom Kippur to the end of the fast after sunset on the following day seemed interminable. The hours dragged although I, not yet 13, the age of religious responsibility, had to fast only half a day, from services on Erev Yom Kippur to noon the next day. That morning was the longest one of the year. In the afternoon, at last, my stomach was no longer whining after I had to return to the synagogue for an hour or two, or even longer. Boys sat downstairs among the men; in accordance with conservative Jewish custom, the ladies sat upstairs, in the balcony that surrounded the high-ceilinged sanctuary. As the reading from the Torah dragged on, one man after another was honored by ascending the steps to the bimah to say the blessing before and after the creaking voice of Lehrer Liffgens chanted verses from the Torah and in the same sing-song slurred how much each man had pledged to donate to the synagogue. No furtive folding of a check or private pledge to hide any chintziness. As time dragged, the air became suffused with a mixture of perfumes and smelling salts that congregants inhaled to maintain their equilibrium and dignity as their stomachs shrank. Or, possibly, to just stay awake. In years when Yom Kippur was early, on a warm September day, catching ones breath outside was not only permissible, but essential, except for Lehrer Liffgens. He endured in his white rabbinic robe and tall white yarmulke, white to symbolize the purification of the soul engendered by this ritualized annual self-examination and prayers. His white prayer shawl with blue stripes along the outer seam covered his narrow shoulders as he hunched over the sacred words. Yes, it always was a very long day.

Once the High Holy Days, Rosh Hashana, the New Year, and Yom Kippur, had passed, religious school resumed for Hans and me; Walter had to cram for his Bar Mitzvah. In spite of cutting up whenever the urge overpowered his parental admonitions, Walter studied diligently for his Bar Mitzvah. Family honor and reputation were at stake. The transformation of a boy without religious responsibilities to a young man who would be in charge of his religious life was to be not only a personal metamorphosis, but also the occasion for a major social event. The Heilbronners were among the prominent Jews of Memmingen, Uncle Alfred that year being the president of the congregation. Walter must have sensed the weight he bore, because he discharged it with honor to Judaism, to his family and himself.

Ein Fast Normales Leben, inspired by Gernot Rœmer, indefatigable chronicler of the persecution of Swabian Jews, includes a photo of Walter at his Bar Mitzvah, his head covered with a black peaker cap and his shoulders and back draped with his new prayer shawl, the *talles*. He faces the bimah, not the congregation, behind a patterned white parapet finished with a black marble railing that separates the worshippers from the ceremonial center, as he chants his passage from the Torah. To his left, in profile, stands his father, in tuxedo and shiny top hat with his folded talles resting on his shoulders; to his right stands Lehrer Liffgens in rabbinic regalia. In a second photo, Walter faces Lehrer Liffgens who gestures with his right hand as he impresses the Bar Mitzvah boy with his new responsibilities. The wood shrine that protects the Torah scrolls, just behind the bimah, is covered with a tapestry bordered by elaborately scrolled stitchery that frames a pair of rampant lions holding the Star of David between their four front paws. The elegant, subdued designs on the wall, reminiscent of those that adorn the Alhambra, are enhanced by the light of large brass floor lamps in each corner and by sunlight filtering through leaded windows.

A solemn and festive scene it was.

Festive and jolly was the party in Walter's honor. His parents had spared no effort to welcome and entertain their guests with food, drink and laughter out in the courtyard below the city wall that beautiful day. It was the Jewish party of the year. It was to be the last party and the last Bar Mitzvah for the Jews of Memmingen. Nazism pervaded the air in 1937, but it had not yet turned systematically deadly. How many of those enjoying the festivities sensed behind the laughter that it soon would stop? Whatever of the future, there was time for this party, for one more joyous event, a memory that has outlived the Nazi era, and almost all of those who laughed, ate and drank on that spring day.

Walter, Uncle Alfred-and-Aunt Helene were drowned in compliments: Walter's faultless chanting, his melodious voice, his mature demeanor, the great food, on and on. Walter also was richly rewarded with gifts, piles of them. The one he was not to have delighted him most. Walter had begged for an air rifle from his parents, but they would have none of it. Rifles were not toys; no way. The Günzburgers, the Heilbronner's best friends, sabotaged the injunction. Walter just about levitated and yelled with delight when he opened the box; so did Uncle Alfred, his father, not in delight. Guests or no, he raised quite a ruckus. Aunt Helene calmed him down. Uncle Alfred relented; Walter was allowed to keep the rifle. The party was back on track.

As soon as the courtyard was clear of guests, Walter set up a target, leaned it against the ancient city wall, a wall that had been peppered with arrows and bullets hundreds of years before, but from the other side. Hans and I also eagerly tried out that forbidden toy. Walter even scored a bull's-eye; I managed to hit the wall somewhere between its foot and roof. That was the last and only time I had any kind of a firearm in my hands.

My appreciation of Jewish life as more than food and gifts matured very slowly; my enthusiasm for forests and meadows, mountains and lakes is innate.

Mountain hikes and water sports

Our family vacations in alpine grandeur or by gem-like lakes left golden memories. They even helped shape those that we, Joan, our children and I, enjoyed years later, mostly in the forests and canyons of the Sierra Nevada or by the rugged, varied and fascinating shore of the Pacific. I never counted days spent with relatives, nice as they were, as real vacations; there, adults always were more important then my vacation; they talked and talked and I was supposed to play. Vacation was when my parents and I relaxed and explored together, with no one else to wedge in between.

The three of us always started out together, but my father often stayed only about half the time, a few days to a week, because he had to get back to visit his customers out in the country, to sell them yardgoods and clothes. Then, my mother and I hiked or swam, read and listened to stories until dad came for another day or two before the end of the interlude. One time, when just the two of us hiked on a stony trail in the Alps, near the Austrian border, a rushing creek blocked our way. How to cross? Wading was out; the water was too cold and swift. We either had to retreat or brave the large peeled log that crossed the rushing water, a few feet above the swirl. Walking across looked too scary on that narrow log. My mother thought for a moment; then she had me sit on the log, one leg dangling to the right, the other on the left, my shoes getting splashed with the cool foam. She nudged up behind me and bit by bit we inched across, pulling ourselves with our hands as we mini-hopped on our bottoms to the distant bank. Relieved and feeling heroic (at least I did), we hiked on.

A few more turns of the trail, and there it stood, small and inviting, a cowherds' weathered wooden hut amid the flower-strewn pasture. A picture-postcard setting. A few cows munched here and there and, to our relief, no bull, king of the pasture, was in sight.

The curly-haired cowherd, short but muscular, face carved by work, wind and sun, greeted us on the stoop and invited us in. My mother and he exchanged a few phrases and, in no time at all, he had filled two wooden bowls with milk, one for each of us. Slurping that cool, unpasteurized, unhomogenized, full-fat, zero-days-old milk after that hike, marvellous.

Then, our host cut big slabs from a huge loaf of rye bread and spooned on each a big dollop of sweet butter, hand-churned that morning. He had no knives for spreading the butter, so we followed his example: Our thumbs made perfectly good substitutes. A push this way, a shove that way, and the whole slice quickly was covered with butter from crust to crust. A lick with my tongue, a swipe on my Lederhosen and my thumb was clean. The adults talked, but I payed no attention; I was busy with my *Butterbrot*.

It was a snack worthy of alpine gods.

I look properly dressed for this mountain adventure. I stand in the doorway of the hut, sturdy shoes on my feet, knee socks, my beloved Lederhosen, a white open-collared shirt and a typical Bavarian jacket with felt collar; in my hand I hold a hiking stick. I have no photo of my mother on that hike, but I do not recall ever seeing her in slacks, just ski pants on white slopes in winter.

My mother paid for our repast and we wandered back down to our inn. This time, crossing the creek was a snap; we knew we could do it with ease.

If there were other children at the inn, they left no impression. It was the cook/baker who left her mark. She was big in every direction, with a heart of butter. I had to be in bed long before the adults. My annoyance at having to miss all that interesting conversation was eased when the cook saw me trudge up the stairs to the room I shared with my parents. "Wait a moment!" She disappeared; in a few seconds she reappeared, this time with my private dessert, second edition, delicious vanilla pudding with fresh strawberry topping. With such a daily treat, I didn't mind missing those evening conversations.

Another year at another inn, the night-time thrill was outside the leaded-glass windows set deeply into thick stone walls. A mountain thunderstorm frantically whipped trees and shrubs from side to side. Sheets of rain burst into view every few seconds, changing from almost invisible to blinding as lightning bolt followed lightning bolt, interruped only by thunder claps that stopped my breath. The storm raged as if a furious Thor had ridden the storm south from Norway to just above our inn. This was the most thrillingly wonderful thunderstorm I ever had experienced. Wild skies never scared me - as long as I was safely inside, dry and warm.

The rage stopped during the night; the rain did not. My mother thought it was crazy, but my father was not about to sit by the fire when he could be in the woods. He assured my mother that we would be just fine out in the rain. We donned our hooded loden coats and off we hiked, the two of us, my father and I. The fresh, wet woodsy aroma followed us along the path below the green canopy supported by the brown, rough trunks of conifers and the smooth gray trunks of beeches, one of my favorite trees, to an inn along the way. All hiking paths in Germany led to inns, sooner or later. We were soaked. My shoes held more water in than out as my father pulled open the heavy wood door to the ample dining room. A flickering and crackling fire beckoned within the stone hearth on the wall opposite the door. Off with our coats; off with our shoes and socks! Now we soaked up heat, instead of rain. Once warm and just damp, we sat down to our Mittagessen. Full, dry and re-energized, we hiked back to our hotel in sunshine and shade, I eager to tell my mother about our adventure.

Those hours in the woods with my father still live.

My father's deep-rooted love of nature and the woods shines through even
as he labored there under duress. Work on farm and in forest was one of the few ways in which he, as a Jew, was allowed to a earn a living as the Nazi clamp tightened. It was at a time when escape from the yoke was becoming an ever fainter hope, when only nature provided solace:

> Lately, I often have been working in the forest, felling trees and readying them for transport. You can imagine how delightful it is to be out there in gorgeous weather, the fresh air at six in the morning, when birds sing and the deer with their young quietly move along the edge of the forest and the Troutmindel splashes through the silent forest; then one feels happy as a [spoiled] poodle and collects new strength for the time ahead.
>
> (From a letter to the Heilbronners, already in the United States, 8 June, 1941)

The Black Forest, country of fairy tales and vacation haunts, also attracted my parents. The lakes of the Black Forest, quiet blue jewels among green forested hills, had been carved by ancient glaciers during their retreat. Titisee was our favorite. We repeatedly spent a week at one of the sprawling clapboard tourist hotels scattered along the lake. My parents swam and I swam under their careful watch and played on the pebbly beach. On this lake, my father rode the wake of a power boat, skimming along on a water ski board, rounded in front, squared off in back, a crude ancestor of water skis. His smile is that of a cowboy who just has subdued a bronco. In another photo, he rows me, in Lederhosen and a wide smile, perched on the seat of a wooden row boat, over the slightly rippled surface of the water. My father sits next to me, dressed in white shirt, sleeves rolled back, a bow tie under his chin, his hands on the oars. Why the formal attire for a spin on a lake? The answer is not to be had. Then, when appetite or just conditioned reflex demanded, we lounged on the veranda of our hotel and indulged in the rich snacks that sweeten life, a piece of chocolate cake or a fruit tart buried under a crown of whipped cream. What more could a family want?

As the early 1930s gave way to the middle of the decade, the Nazi regime clouded the sky over the Black Forest. Some resorts started to exclude so-called non-Arians, Jews like us. We still found inns that welcomed us, but the poison had spread sufficiently to make Jews, including my parents, cautious with strangers and they certainly did not advertise their Jewishness. One sunny afternoon, when I was playing alone, a couple of strangers, a man and a women who would not have stood out in a crowd, approached me and made small talk, as one would with a seven-year old. They kept talking and smiling; they tried to gain my confidence so they could find out whether or not I was Jewish. They asked in a round-about way and I responded in a round-about way. They eventually guessed "yes" and strolled over to my parents, gradually found out that we were what they were, became friends, and both parties heaped praise on me for my diplomatic evasiveness. Had my parents instructed me to be cautious on the subject, or had I picked up that discretion by listening to adult conversations?

That was the last vacation in public places for us. No room for us Jews at any inn. Those who did not voluntarily reject Jews were told to keep us out. The restriction annoyed my parents, but they still smelled no danger.

End of the idyll

The end was not sudden; it slithered in bit by bit, rule by rule, insult by insult, until it burst full force into the consciousness of our family late in 1938. Not that I knew that my idyllic childhood had ended, because I did not know that it was idyllic. It just was as it was. Only as I resurrected and assembled my memories, first on tape, then on paper, did my childhood take on shape, experience by experience, event by event, impression by impression. Sometimes the pictures welled up so fast, first my mouth and then my fingers could hardly keep pace with the rush; sometimes my eyes would flood; sometimes the recollections were disconnected, an event or impression from here, one from there, one from when I was little past the baby stage to another as I had turned into a boy. One memory brought forth another one, layer upon layer; memories that had been buried by later events and experiences popped up at odd times, unexpectedly, without effort, in the middle of a conversation totally unrelated to the event of long ago, or as I was pedalling along on my bicycle or soaped up in the shower. Then, when there seemed to be no more unexplored mines in my memory, and after I had ordered these pieces of my past, that is when the assembled fragments of the mirror in which I saw my childhood were revealed as the reflection of an enviable idyll.

It was this idyll that started to disintegrate in 1938.

We boys, Jakob, Hanns, Adolf, and I still played together early that year. By mid-year, Adolf no longer was allowed to play with us, because I was a Jew, a non-desirable. He was permitted, likely encouraged, by his Nazi parents to harass me with epithets, the equivalent of "kike" and worse. He learned these insults not only at home but also in the *Hitlerjugend,* the Hitler Youth, a propagandized, bastardized Nazi version of the Boy Scouts in which the glory of the stiff-armed Hitler salute, Nazi songs, and hatred of Jews were stuffed into the young, impressionable minds. Jakob and Hanns continued to play with me and I attended school, as usual.

Kristallnacht

Kristallnacht, the Night of Shattered Glass, exploded any remaining notion of "as usual". It is a night engraved into every Jewish mind old enough to remember and aware enough to comprehend this assault. On the morning of 10 November, 1938, my family, distraught, disgusted and scared faced the destroyed display windows of our store and the smashed hopes for our future. We, in Mindelheim, and our relatives in other cities were lucky. In hundreds of cities and towns, not only windows were smashed by the Nazi goons at the command of the Nazi leadership, but also heads. Jews could be killed at will. Synagogues were torched; the cowards even attacked the dead, sledgehammering grave markers. The cherished synagogue in Memmingen, the center of Jewish life for our family and the Heilbronners, and the Jewish cemetery were among the mute, remembered victims.

I knew nothing of the causes or the extent of the terror. These are preserved in documents of history, in memorials and museums. What I see is the fear in the faces of my parents, of my grandmother and of Aunt Erna as they huddled in our living room, not knowing what would come next or what to do. For my father, fear turned into defiance. He sat down and wrote to some official of Mindelheim, castigating the cowards who had done the deed under cover of darkness and fog. Whoever received the letter could not have been a rabid Nazi, else my father would not have survived as long as he did.

From that time on we Jews were marked. From that day on, men and boys were mandated to insert the middle name Israel, as in Werner Israel Liebschütz; Sara was forced onto women and girls. We had to use these honored, but now pejorative biblical names, wherever our name might be visible to outsiders: on official documents, on addresses of private letters or post cards and to identify the sender. With this decree, the Nazis mocked the biblical instructions to the Jews to "Bind them [the words of God] as a sign on your hand; let them serve as a symbol on your forehead ..." and it licensed anyone to treat us with contempt.

The day after the night that shamed a once respected nation, but failed to wake the world, my father, like thousands of other Jewish men, had to report to the police station. He was transported to Dachau, the earliest concentration camp the Nazis had built to assemble Jews and other "undesirables". We did not see him again for more than a week. Fear pressed on the rest of the family. He was pale and thinner when he was released, but he was back, back with us.

Now, escaping Germany was the goal, the only goal. Until this night of terror, my father thought that he, as a decorated hero of World War I, and therefore we, would be safe from the ravages of the Jew haters. He had not run from the French at

Verdun when he fought for his fatherland, Germany; he would not run from Germany, which he believed to be as much his country as any other German's. Now, he knew that this conviction, this hope, was a mirage. Mindelheim was a backwater and the flood rose more slowly here than in bigger cities. The respect the family had enjoyed for decades invited complacency. Now, to run, if we could, was the only choice. But where to? Who would have us? How will we, that is my parents, earn a living? They had no skills other than being merchants and there were plenty of these everywhere.

And the world remained silent. After all, we only were Jews.

A perceptive and brave customer of many years, a Mr. Egger, had warned my father, but to no avail. He simply could not accept, believe, that Germany, his fatherland, the country for which he had shed blood, could become the apogee of evil. Mr. Egger's son, who is my age, wrote thus to Mr. Gernot Rœmer:

> Geltendorf, 9 July, 2000
>
> Dear Mr. Rœmer,
>
> On page 128 of your book "Swabian Jews" [See Appendix; Sources: Rœmer, G. 1990] is a picture of the dry goods store at Maximilianstrasse 30 in Mindelheim, owned by Mr. Liebschütz.
>
> In this connection, I would like to relate the following occurence, which I witnessed as a 10 year old boy in my parents' home.
>
> My mother (we lived in Blœcktach in the Allgæu) was a long-time customer of Mr. Liebschütz, even during the Nazi period. My late father was a dedicated Nazi opponent. ...
>
> Mr. Liebschütz came in 1938, as every year in September (that was before the night of the progrom [Kristallnacht]), to our farm in his business car. (My father had much civil courage and still maintained the business relation with Mr. Liebschütz).
>
> When my mother had finished buying fabrics, my father told Mr. Liebschütz (I was standing next to them and heard every word): "Mr. Liebschütz, follow me; I have to tell you something very important. Leave Germany as soon as possible, Hitler, this scoundrel, will murder all of you (i.e. the Jews). War is coming and I built a shelter under the hay barn. Bring your goods to me and I will sell them for you. Since one can transfer money to Switzerland, you won't lose anything.
>
> Mr. Liebschütz responded (verbatim): "I know that Hitler dislikes us, but I am a decorated officer of the World War and even the Nazis respect heroism."
>
> Now my father: "These crooks respect nothing, and you will regret it terribly if you stay here." So much for the conversation.

> After war broke out, Mr. Liebschütz was assigned to work for a farmer in Warmisried (near Eggenthal). Then, in 1943, the newspaper carried a story that the authorities had found several pounds of butter, flour, and sugar in the room of this enemy of the people and that he, therefore, had been arrested. (You can well figure out how the foods got there.) My father showed me the article and said: "See, son, that's what the Nazis do."
>
> To conclude: Mr. Liebschütz died in the KZ [concentration camp] and his son survived. He said: "I never again will step on German soil."
>
> ....
>
> (signed) Gottfried Egger
>
> (I translated the applicable paragraphs and cite them with permission.)

When I opened the envelope from Mr. Rœmer and then read the copy of this letter, not just once, but twice, it was as if a burst of light ejected by a remote star had illuminated the past over distance and time. What I had heard about my father's innocent disbelief, Mr. Egger now had verified.

That frigthening November night finally convinced my father that we would have to leave Germany, and forthwith. He had a solution to his lack of practical skills. He always liked the out of doors, was physically fit and willing to work hard. Hardly out of Dachau, he enrolled in a center for Jews, near Berlin, where prospective emigrants were taught the basics of agriculture. Whatever it would require, he would do it; he enjoyed the challenge. He was in his early forties but still athletic enough to be on the center's soccer team, the oldest player. He later had use for the farming skills he learned, but not where he had hoped to use them, in America.

Regardless of any other plans, realistic or ephermal, my safety was first on my parent's agenda, especially after Adolf Hundegger and some other boys chased me with sticks and shouts of *Jude.* I had never run so fast before and reached our door exhausted, crying, shaking and shaken. There was no more riding my bike on the streets of Mindelheim, no more horsing around on the Marktplatz, no more testing Officer Schultze with our games in and around the forbidden fountain. I was confined to be with one of my parents when outside.

That abysmal night in November 1938 not only destroyed lives and the livelyhood of German Jews but also spewed forth the edict that expelled from public schools every Jewish child in Germany. I henceforth was barred from my school. I would contaminate the Aryan children.

Not to have their child schooled was impossible for Jewish parents, in 1938, now, or at any time since the dawn of Judaism. It would be mental asphyxiation. A boarding school, distant from Mindelheim, was the solution.

Boarding School Days and One Night

The *Jüdische Landschulheim* (Country Boarding School for Jewish Children) was nestled in the forested hills above Herrlingen, a village in the state of Wurtemberg. I still can see my room, not one for me alone, but one I had to share with two other boys. I walked in and stared. Amazing! I had never seen anything like it before - one bed on top of another one, the first double bunk of my life. The thin mattress rested on several boards that crossed the narrow side of the bed and were supported by a flange of the metal frame. As a newcomer, I had to bunk near the ceiling. Boy two slept below me, boy three on a single bed set at a right angle to the double bunk, his feet below and to the left of my head when I looked at the wall. This detail turned out to be not a minor matter for him, or me.

Lights out and darkness. I was beat. My first night away from home, alone; no parent, no adult relative, just Walter and Hans, still boys themselves, in a room down a hall somewhere. I was asleep in no time. I woke with a start: I was moving; my mattress was moving, it sagged, it sank, it and I hit the mattress of the lower bunk. I was dazed and confused. What in hell had happened? Nothing serious. It was a trick built into these bunk beds and played on first nighters. The boy in the lower bunk lay on his back, raised his legs and, with his feet, slowly and silently raised and turned the center board just enough so it would slip off the support flanges. He quickly and silently set the board on the floor. Board two followed and then board three. My mattress and I landed just a split second after the culprit had rolled out of the way. The trick had worked; we all laughed, restored my bunk and then settled down for the night.

Revenge I got, soon, unpremeditated and not at all sweet. I was asleep; I woke up; my stomach stung, and splash: I vomited - on the bunk below mine, on the single bed next to our double bunk, on the wall next to it, but not at all on my own bed. The head below me escaped by chance, the other one because it was not his head, but his blanket-covered feet that rested nearest me, on the single bed. Who was more lucky, the other two guys or I? What a disgusting mess! What a stink! What cussing! The boys yelled for somebody, some adult. Boys from the room next door stuck their noses in, very briefly. Did I have to change the sheets and clean the floor and wall? If yes, I probably would remember. Luckily, I did not have to rely on my charming personality to live down this eruption; cookies and cakes from home quickly led to forgiveness.

Of school in Herrlingen I remember nothing, of sports, details. Then, like a ghost from the shadows of the past, appeared one of our teachers. Jenny Heymann, who I did not remember in the slightest, had escaped to England and returned to Germany in 1945 where she still was living in 1995, looking much younger than her 105 years in a photo in *Ein fast normales Leben.*

When I arrived in Herrlingen, the dead, damp November air hung over my new home. The meadow that spread from the school to the dark conifer forest beyond was grey-brown, ready to be transformed into a glistening white carpet by the first snow that brightened the landscape soon thereafter. More snow fell, and soon all was white, meadow, road, and the pines of the forest. Brilliant scenes like these make winter bearable, a marvel, even a thrill, in frigid climates. The snow flakes also brought delights: snowball fights, snowmen, and, above all, sledding.

The road through the forest from Herrlingen to our school was ideal for sledding, steep enough and curvy. Just as winding mountain roads heighten the senses and freeways bore, so are serpentine runs down a hill on a flitting sled a thrill that a straight run can not hope to match. The powder snow became packed and slippery so neither cars nor horse-drawn wagons could climb the hill for a few days. We boys (girls did not seem to exist) were the kings of the white road. We plopped on our bellies and raced, wool-capped, head first, down the hill, cheeks stinging in the cold. Noisy winter play. Whipping down at the end of a train, that was a real kick. The boy on the front sled hooked his boots into the runners of the second sled, the one on the second hooked his into the third, and so on for four or even five sleds. A shove from one or two buddies and off we were, spraying snow in all directions, yelling on top of our lungs and finally dumping on a curve we took too fast. When the train was only two or three sleds long, one of us would run along the side, shoving, till the sleds had picked up speed and then hop on the back of the lead rider, adding weight to gain momentum. Why none of us ever broke a leg or a head is a mystery.

After the snow had melted and the meadow by the school was green and the air mild, javelin throwing was my favorite sport. We had no real javelins, but fashioned them ourselves from whips of some shrub. We cut off the shoots with our pocket knives - I have had one ever since I was seven or eight - and in a few seconds the whip had turned into a sharpened javelin. Fortunately not too sharp. Half a dozen of us lined up on one end of the field, the rest, throwing distance down the filed. By tossing the javelins to each other, we saved the trouble of an empty run to retrieve the missile we just had thrown. I was the first and only victim: one hit me on my naked thigh and left a bloody, dirty crack. After that, our javelins flitted one way only. Where was the staff to keep us from being so stupid from the start? May be it was the loose un-German supervision that made Herrlingen such an upbeat place.

With flowered meadows bordered by forested hills, fun with other boys and not a trace of homesickness, the epithets and threats in Mindelheim and of the dangers of the world beyond were forgotten and far away. While we played and studied (?), my parents worried and scurried, trying to escape Germany, or to at least ship me to safety.

Walter and Hans left Herrlingen when snow still covered the ground in 1939; they had been admitted to Switzerland. For me, and all the others there, children, teachers, staff, the fun stopped in the early summer of 1939. The Nazis closed the school. We were sent home.

I next was parked at a boarding school in Esslingen.

An imposingly large white clapboard mansion fronted by a spacious veranda bordered by white balusters on which rested a wide, slightly rounded rail sheltered the now nameless school. The building might have been a sanitarium or a pension at one time, a resort where guests lounged and warmed themselves under sunny skies, sipping coffee topped with whipped cream and nibbling on some sweet morsel topped with more whipped cream. This edifice, with its parquet floors, carved and glassed doors, and frieze-decorated walls seemed much too refined for a bunch of school boys and girls - yes there were girls - who had not yet mastered middle class refinement.

From the veranda, my eyes swept over the valley below, where Esslingen straddled the river Neckar. One or twice, some man, whether a distant relative, some relative's friend or aquaintance, I have no idea, picked me up at the school and together we walked chatting into Esslingen, about 20 minutes away. There, he treated me to my first cola drink, somehow I think it was the real thing, a super fizzy Coke. Did I like the flavor, the novelty, or just being treated? I doubt it was the flavor. At least now, I would rather swallow cod liver oil than sip a cola drink.

She, the one who I remember, lived in Esslingen and sauntered up the wooden steps of the veranda every school day morning. She was plump to overly plump, brown-haired, brown-eyed, about my height and, maybe a little older than I was. Her mouth chattered and her eyes smiled at me. She followed me around whenever we were not in class and would have made a real pest of herself had she had not had one big attraction: She frequently brought me cookies her mother had baked. What a talented and indulgent mother! What had she told her about me? How could I not be at least pleasant? Then, one day, mother and daughter came strolling toward me on the veranda. Why could not the daughter look more like her mother? Gracious smile and a figure even a 10-year old noticed and still sees, 60 plus years later. Except, on that day, I simply saw a well-proportioned roundness that complemented her smile. As a pre-teen, I had not even a clue that there was a mysterious and fascinating chapter called SEX in the book of life. From that day forward, I unreluctantly paid the price for the cookies, listening to the daughter as if I cared, as we sat on the railing of the inviting veranda, she talking, I munching, my heart beating normally.

The cookie girl's name faded away long ago, but I can't help wonder what happened to her and her mother. Did they, or only their memory survive the Nazi scourge? Is my mind, are these lines, their only memorial?

"*Kein Rennen im Gang!*".- No running in the corridor! That was the rule and command. Sign or no sign, running down these long shiny wood floors was hard to resist, especially when the aroma of food escaped the kitchen. I hurried down the hall, pushed against one of the swinging doors of the dining room and CRASH! A yell of pain, glass all over the place, blood on his hand, adults yelling and a boy blaming me, of course. My guilt was not *that* clear cut. Knowing myself, I probably was running. Still, I was the one who had pushed the proper door, the IN door, the one on my right, and on the wooden frame, not on the etched glass. The bloody-handed boy had pushed the door to his left, the IN door, my door, instead of the OUT door, and on the glass to boot. I must have explained all this quite clearly and convincingly, because I ended up reprimanded but not officially blamed. Slow down I did, hard as it was.

The girl with the cookies stopped coming after three or four months. This boarding school too was shuttered by Nazi fiat. While I was there studying, eating cookies, listening to my friend and trying to walk, not run in the halls, my parents, and Swiss relatives scraped together possibilities to get me out of Germany. I suppose I knew of it in a general way, but nothing specific, certainly not that I might have to leave alone, without my father, without my mother.

Day one of September, 1939. Germany Invades Poland! "*Krieg*!" the headlines screamed. Martial music, exitement, blared from our radio; hysterically elated reports of victory after victory for the Wehrmacht. Dejection - we were trapped - and soon humiliation for my father, my mother; I was too young to know what I had signed with my schoolboy handwriting and remember nothing of that day. Herr Rœmer resurrected it in his *Ein fast normales Leben* . I see a post card-sized, typed document and this is what it says, in German, of course:

> Confirmation !
> I officially confirm the proclamation, that I and the members of my family no longer are allowed to move on the street & public places etc.
> Mindelheim, 7 September, 1939
> (Signed) Jakob Isr. Liebschütz
> Fanni Sara Liebschütz
> Werner Israel Liebschütz
> Availble as a complete report at the Mindelheim District Magistrate
> Mindelheim 9.7.1939
> Security Police

We were under house arrest. This odious order was lifted after two days.

The race to escape, to get at least me out of Germany became desperate. Before the fateful morning of my departure, an unforgettable pause.

The one remaining Jewish school anywhere near Mindelheim was run by the Jewish community of Augsburg. Fortuitously, a cousin of my father and her husband, Lydia and Moritz Einstein, lived in this ancient, mid-sized city less than a train hour from home. They recently had bid farewell to their children, Siegbert and Liese, entrusting them to a *Kindertransport* for safe conduct to England. The Einsteins had a room and a welcome for me. I felt right at home, although I had no memory of ever having met them before. But, the magic was at school.

She had long, nearly straight light brown hair that cascaded over her shoulders and a face so soft and pretty as I had never seen before. My almost 11-year old heart raced at her sight. Unlike Charlie Brown, who never had the courage to talk to the little red-haired girl, I had no trouble talking to this lovely brown-haired miss. She was the first to melt my heart. From my last glimpse of her at the end of one school day to her smile the following morning seemed a forever that happily ended as we again hung our coats out in the hall. Was she sweet on me? A forever mystery. Then, one morning, in the middle of class, the door opened and Aunt Lydia strode over to the teacher. I had to come with her, right now. Why the rush? I retrieved my workbooks, pencils and pen and dropped them into my backpack. I turned to her, the one of the indelible image; one last glance, one last meeting of our eyes, then eternity.

Out in the hall, Aunt Lydia told me why the hurry. Papa was on his way to pick me up. I was to leave for Switzerland in less than two weeks; my parents wanted me to be with them as long as possible before that day.

The secret idyll had ended after just a week.

Her face, her hair, she - they clung to my memory for years to come; I longed for her; I dreamed of her. As long as I prayed, I beseeched God to let me see her again, to let her be mine.

Just like the cookie girl of Esslingen, she, the sweet dream girl of Augsburg, is nameless. Did she survive to live a life, or is my memory her only memorial?

The Holocaust swallowed Aunt Lydia and Uncle Moritz. Siegbert, still a boy, died in England. Liese arrived in the United States with nothing but hope, became Lee, worked, married, and now lives on Long Island with her memories, just as I live with mine.

Toward the exit

A near total memory lapse hides the last days with my parents and my grandmother. Aunt Erna already was safely in England. If only the two steamer trunks that held my possessions and still gather dust in our attic could speak. They travelled with me to Switzerland, on to Detroit, and then with us, with Joan and me, to Davis and Fresno, California. One trunk covered with black leather, now cracked, is bounded by two wood reenforcing bands protected by brass corners and still is decorated with a label that advertises: SCHWEIZERHO..., WALDHAUS ..... The other trunk, covered with cracked brown leather, is even larger and just as sturdy. No wonder they survived transatlantic and transcontinental journeys and at least 60 years. My mother stuffed them with clothing, from underwear and cotton socks for summer and wool stockings for winter to coats, shoes, shirts and sweaters; from handkerchiefs and towels and wash cloths to my navy blue ski pants, jacket, knit wool cap and boots. Clothes and shoes to fit me now, as an 11 year old, to fit me a year from now and two and more years later, enough of everything until we, my parents, my grandmother and I, would be settled in America, or any other haven; enough until my parents could clothe and feed me again. My beloved bike, clean and shiny, stood next to the trunks, as if ready to carry me to a new world. My skis, the well-worn pair my mother had saved from her girlhood, and the poles were on the floor, tied together, a strap on each end and one in the middle. My roller skates had to stay behind; they were too heavy.

A small leather suitcase, light enough when packed so I could carry it, held a change of clothes, slippers, tooth brush and Kolynos toothpaste, the brand we used. Bread and cheese to hold me until my next real meal, wherever that might be, my mother's Voigtlander bellows camera and, 60 years later, the most precious thing of all, an address book about three inches by four, covered with sky blue cloth adorned with five stitched flowers with white stems and leaves and a white middle surrounded by red petals, two flowers on the front and three on the back, kept company in my school backpack. Between Augsburg and this day, my mother had me copy in the addresses of relatives in Switzerland, the United States, and in South Africa. Dozens of addresses of family and friends joined these over the decades, some now crossed out because their owners have died and others because we lost contact over the years. The address of my parents, of my home until now, is not in the blue booklet; it was lodged in my memory.

How come I was allowed to escape Germany, so late in 1939, after Germany already had bloodied Poland, when other children had to remain in the prison that was the Nazi Reich? Luck, rules and allegedly greased palms opened the way. The Nazis permitted children 13 years old and younger, but not their parents, to emigrate, if any other country would let them in. The Swiss admitted such children, if, and only if, they lived within a certain distance of the Swiss border and if someone would support them financially so they would not burden the Swiss treasury. I do not know what the saving distance was; but I do know that Mindelheim is about 50 miles from the border, a little beyond that magic line of long ago, almost certain death on one side, life, my life, on the other.

I would turn 11 in October of 1939, two saving years younger than the cut-off age. But, how could the distance be shortened? Aunt Jenny Gundelfinger in Zurich, an aunt of my mother's by marriage, helped move the border. She had been widowed for almost 20 years, but was financially secure, even wealthy. Supposedly, she bribed a Swiss official so he would shrink the distance between Switzerland and Mindelheim. So it was that Aunt Jenny's generosity and the alleged dishonesty - I prefer to believe true kindness - of a Swiss official saved my life.

The fateful day rose, overcast, but not rainy. I kissed my grandmother good-bye. What her thoughts were I can only imagine. I simply wanted to get going. How we, my mother, my father and I, arrived at the railroad station is lost. As Jews, we no longer were allowed to have a car, even if we could have afforded one after our store was destroyed on *Kristallnacht* and then forcibly closed. Would there have been someone with the courage and a car who would have given us a ride in late 1939, less than a year after the pogrom?

The train steamed into the station where I had watched many of them rush by or stop, from where I now was to start a voyage into the unknown, a trip of no return. Men in blue smocks loaded my trunks, bike, and skis into a freight wagon. My mother and I stepped up into a passenger car, 3rd class, with wood benches; my father followed, suitcase in one hand. A whistle, a jostle and Mindelheim, that marvellous, intimate, familiar playground of my childhood started to move by the train as it accelerated toward the next stop, Memmingen. Uncle-Alfred-and-Aunt-Helene, Walter and Hans no longer lived there; they were safely in England. Then, through autumn countryside, some trees already bare, on to Friedrichshafen on the shores of the *Bodensee*, Lake Constance.

The train ride is a blur; the scene at the dock in Friedrichshafen is etched in my mind. My father stands on the right, my mother on the left and I in the middle, his left hand holding my right hand, her right hand holding my left hand. My school backpack hangs on my shoulders and my suitcase stands to the side. A vague silhouette approaches over the horizon and turns into a gleaming white structure as the ferry glides silently over the calm lake and clearly into view. Clusters of people and one lone women with a round face framed by curly brown hair and wrapped in a long coat await the ferry. We walk over to her, a perfect stranger. Was she German or Swiss? It was irrelevant. My parents had to take a chance. My mother asked her whether she would be kind enough to watch over me as we crossed the lake, until I was picked up on Swiss soil at Romanshorn. "Natürlich" she said with a smile. (I am not smiling as I recall the scene. The welling memory cuts deep, as the episode did not. It was just another adventure, as Herrlingen, Esslingen and Augsburg had been, with a boat ride as an extra feature. Fortunately, we can not know the future.) A blast of the horn; the ferry docks. Dock hands secure the wide gangplank. The grip of my parents' hands tightens around my hands. The moment of separation is now. Some parental admonishments to behave well, reassurances that we soon would be together again, tear-stained kisses and then my possessions and I are on the ferry. I am on Swiss territory, my parents on German ground. The gangplank is retracted. A blast of the horn; the ferry and I distance ourselves from Germany. The kind lady stands next to me as my parents and I wave to each other that late October day in 1939. My parents recede; they shrink; they dissolve into the landscape. My last glimpse of them, alive, forever. I was eleven years old.

PART TWO

In a Strange, New Universe

From the last kisses of my parents to the unknown, sheltering shore of Switzerland, just about an hour had passed. In that hour, my familiar universe had dissolved, disappeared, as if swallowed by the depths of Lake Constance. Nobody and nothing would be familiar. Nobody and nothing could be taken for granted. Nobody owed me anything, neither parental love nor material support. I depended on the kindness of strangers, some relatives, some not. My future would rest on promises made to my parents. What were they? How good were they? Would the strangers allow me to be myself, to feel at home until my parents picked me up on the way to America? None of these questions rummaged in my mind as Aunt Else Biederman, my grandmother Mina's niece, embraced me as I stepped on to Swiss soil at Romanshorn and thanked the lady who had watched over me on that passage from certitude to uncertainty.

Right then, as Aunt Elsa and I sat in the speeding train to Zurich, only the immediate future was on my mind. Who is this Aunt Elsa? What will happen when we arrive in Zurich? Where would I live? With these questions scrambled in my mind, I am not surprised that I remember nothing from that express to my future. Decades later, partly on the same tracks, but in the opposite direction, from Zurich to St. Gallen, the train glides through a lovely month-of-May countryside, hilly and green, pastures and fields, dark patches of forests here and there, creeks and young rivers shine along the rails and we cross them with a rumble over bridges. We, Joan and I, flit through villages and stop in a town or two, pass industrial developments and an occasional ruin of a castle on a hill. This is the scenery I either saw or ignored as I sat next to Aunt Elsa, ages ago, on the way to Zurich.

Aunt Elsa was short and plump; her face smiled easily and her mouth kept busy much of the time. Maybe she just wanted to make small talk to cushion my landing among strangers. She had been appointed to pick me up because she lived in St. Gallen, not far from Romanshorn. Her husband, Jakob, who had owned a small embroidery factory in that famous enclave of embroidery, already had died. She lived a quiet, modest life.

Uncle Victor Bollag, whose visit had sprung me from school for a few hours a year or two earlier, welcomed us at train-side and drove us two, my suitcase and backpack around a few corners to their home on the Tœdistrasse. The trunks, my bike and skis must have stayed in storage at the railway station, because I did not see them again that day. Only my bike worried me; everything else was replaceable, or so I thought, but my bike was a treasure beyond value. Part of me would have died if we would not have been reunited. I didn't ask where it was, I was too busy looking around, listening and remembering: "Speak when spoken to".

Tœdistrasse, neither wide nor narrow, traversed a quiet neighborhood of granite-gray apartment houses, two or three stories high, solid and stolid, much more imposing than any building I had seen in Mindelheim, safe for the Rathaus. Three or four wide speckled-granite steps, bordered by black wrought iron railings, led to the entry of the Bollag's upstairs home near the middle of the block. The upper half of the carved, shiny two-wing oak door framed bevelled glass insets etched with Victorian curlicues and floral designs. Uncle Victor pushed a shiny brass button to the right of the door; a few seconds later, a buzz and, like magic, he opened the erstwhile locked right half of the door.

We stepped into the vestibule, first Aunt Elsa, then I, Uncle Victor last. A wide hardwood staircase, accompanied by well-polished wood hand rails on each side, led to the entry of the flat. Here, we were greeted by Aunt Martha, who also had been with us that day in Mindelheim, and by Jürg and Hanspeter, the two Bollag sons. Other than their welcoming smiles, I remember nothing about them from this, my first day in Switzerland, or of the maid who soon served us Mittagessen. But, the next six and a half sad, happy, amazing years engraved in my mind lasting impressions of the Bollags.

The Bollags told me where I would be living, which meant nothing to me, since the geography of Switzerland had not yet settled in my memory. The welcoming meal ended, Uncle Victor, Aunt Martha walked me over to Aunt Jenny Gundelfinger's apartment, a stroll of no more than 10 minutes, so I could greet my benefactor, whose concern, persistence, ingenuity and money paved my way into Switzerland. I slept at the Bollags that first night, divided from my parents not only by distance, but also by a border guarded by armed soldiers on both sides of this crucial line on a map. This day and the next are as gray in my memory as the stones that built street upon street of residences, apartment blocks, banks and hotels in Zurich. Nothing registers until we arrived at Rütibühl, the next day.

Rütibühl

Among wooded hills and meadows

Uncle Victor and Aunt Martha drove me to this outpost in the country by a route whose every curve, roadside house and barn, tree and fence I would come to know so well that I could conjure it up in my mind half asleep; some of it I can see now, six decades later. When we arrived, my bike, trunks and skis were waiting for me. Where was it that we were, I and my possessions?

Kinderheim Rütibühl sat in solitude about 8 miles from the center of Zurich, measured by birds' flight, although few places in the Swiss countryside more than a mile apart can be reached by travelling in a straight line. We had covered about 12 miles, southeast upslope on a paved city road with streetcar tracks in the middle, to the Forch, where the line ended; there, we turned right onto a mostly level, curvy country road travelling southerly to a cluster of farm houses, barns and neatly stacked manure piles, the hamlet of Rütibühl. Finally, a narrower, gravelled, tree-lined stretch of a half mile took us to the end of the road. There, the three-story Kinderheim dominated a rise like a manor house in Scotland, except it was neither ancient nor pretentious.

Four sets of double columns painted white visually segment the ground floor of the large house of indistinct architecture. These columns support the roof of a porch, which also is the floor of the southeast-facing windowed veranda on the main floor. The same set of columns, partly hidden behind the railing of the veranda, continue upward to support the upper floor. The stucco walls were painted a friendly butter yellow, the only feature retrieved from memory, not from the snapshot in front of me.

I never had been in a house this big or one that reigned over the countryside unhampered by neighbors. The sheer bulk of the house amazed me, but it was the expanse of nature that captivated me. I, alone and my pockets empty, was to live in a fairy tale setting fit for a prince.

Before I could explore all this newness, Uncle Victor and Aunt Martha introduced themselves and me to Frau Vonesch, the mistress of the house.

This Kinderheim had been picked by the *Schweizer Kinderhilfe* (Children's Help of Switzerland), I suppose with Aunt Jenny's approval. No way would she have first inspected this, my new home, although it was she who paid for my board and keep. By then, she was a lady in her mid-sixties who travelled reluctantly and who engaged others to take care of worldly details.

The Bollags soon drove off to leave me with Mrs. Vonesch in her house among dark pine forests and pastures dotted with the leafless trees of late October. Uncle Victor and Aunt Martha never again appeared at our door.

My memory looks northward from where the gravel road dissolves into a parking area in front of the garage, tucked into the hill under the house. A level grassy sward, may be ten paces wide, gives way to a slope of a hundred feet or so that then trails off into a level meadow where deer grazed at dawn and dusk, does and bucks. In spring, their speckled fawns hopped along on stiff legs. Distant, now skeletal trees trace the road from the Forch to Rütibühl; beyond stretches the hump of the *Pfannenstiel* (Panhandle), dark-forested. I stand at about 2100 feet above sea level; the crest of the Pfannenstiel rises another 400 feet and between lies the shallow valley that reaches from Rütibühl to the Forch. Turning left and walking up to the rise behind the house and 50 yards more, I stand at the edge of a shadowy forest. Turning left again and wandering along the periphery of the large vegetable garden, now populated with a few rows of cabbages and carrots, I stop, entranced. In the far distance, to the south and east, a white garland of Alpine peaks. The anchors of the peaks are hidden by the black-green undulating ridges of the foothills. Nearer, across the placid blue of Lake Zurich rises a ridge much like the one on which I stand, covered with a patchwork of meadows and forests that slopes down to the banana-shaped lake. The view is breathtaking, astounding. Coming full circle, my eyes scan pastures, orchards, the roofs and chimneys of Rütibühl, and beyond and above, the southeasterly tail of the Pfannenstiel. This is where I would live, out in the country, way out. Far from the Marktplatz, from the sidewalks of Mindelheim, from the alleys and the city wall; far from the Obere and Untere Tor, from the cemetery in which we played; far from my mother and my father.

Later that first day, I met the rest of the family, Herr Karl Vonesch, the son, also Karl, I believe, and the daughter, Lucie. Even before I met them, I became instant friends with the family dog, a wolf hound.

Apprenticed to life without parents

The Voneschs and Mauser, too

Frau Vonesch was the central character for me; she ran the house. The younger Karl and Lucie addressed her as Mutter and Mr. Vonesch may have done the same. To me she was Frau Vonesch from day one to the last day under her roof. To call her, or anyone of the older generation, by the first name was out of the question for me, still a boy.

Frau Vonesch stocky, about five foot six tall, strong physically and in voice, encompassed her domain from a squarish round, mid-forties face lacking any outstanding feature; she and her brown hair were disciplined, the hair in a single braid wound circularly around the crown of her head. She was a no-nonsense type with a sense of humor and no more would spoil than berate me unreasonably. She kept the house Swiss clean and expected everyone else to follow her example. I came to like her in spite of her task-master approach to chores she unloaded on me, inside the house and in the garden. I first learned gardening from her, its work and rewards, and about household tasks that needed to be done, again and again, over and over, without end. At home I had to shine my shoes, make my bed and sometimes help dry the dishes; that was about it. Now, I was about to find out what work was, real work.

Retrieving these memories, a few with the aid of pictures, is a venture down a long inclined tunnel. As soon as I step beyond the entrance, a curtain closes behind my back and the path is lighted only from within my head. Some of the features in the tunnel are in full light, others only dimly perceptible; some chambers remain dark, even their entrance obscured by time. Every now and then, when nothing but darkness seems to loom ahead, a vivid memory will stray beyond itself and illuminate a passage, sometimes faintly, sometimes clearly. When my mind ventures into this recess, it brigthens another passage until the network of corridors connects and makes sense. Retrieving people, places and events from the depths and finding the relationships chance had assigned to them on the stage of my life is strains mind and body. However, once started, the endeavor became a quest I neither could nor wanted to stop. I was impelled to push forward to explore my childhood and youth the best I could, to fill gaps, to find out, if possible, how those years with and without my parents constructed my later life. Only after the deepest chamber had been probed or abandoned in darkness, could I return to the surface, to light, satisfied that I tried to give shape and life to that past and its inhabitants. Whatever the fate of these memoirs, I had to write them, whether for an audience of a few or of many, a link between the unerasable past, happy and tragic, the variable present and the unknowable future.

My father was strong; Herr Vonesch was a clone of Hercules. He appeared to be slightly taller than my father, slimmer than stocky and muscle from his finger tips to his toes. The sinews in his arms resembled cables and his biceps bulged incompressibly hard; squeeze as hard as I could, they wouldn't budge when he challenged me to try, with a satisfied grin on his face. Quizzical show-me eyes dominated his regular features; his high forehead was accentuated by a slightly receding hairline, as might be expected in a man in his late forties with graying hair. Mr. Vonesch's manner was unadorned, straight to the point, definitely not mild, but neither overbearing.

Mr. Vonesch earned his living as a highly skilled craftsman, a glazier in a shop on the Forchstrasse in Zurich where I visited him once or twice and saw the products of his skill. He not only cut and installed windows for homes and businesses, but also crafted mirrors, simple and elegant, with bevelled edges, some set in elaborately carved frames. Mr. Vonesch's mastery of his craft was reflected in the artistically etched and polished glass inserts of carved entry doors to homes and apartments of the upper and semi-upper crusts, such as those of the Bollags.

Mr. Vonesch's skills extended well beyond his trade; they encompassed whatever needed to be built, fixed, or improved around the house to maintain it in Swiss-watch running order, whether it was carpentry, electrical work or plumbing. He also raised the rabbits we ate and spaded and then raked the soil for the vegetable garden. When I admiringly asked how he had learned his many skills, he shrugged: "I once slept next to someone who knew how."

Luck had set me down with a man whom I could respect and try to emulate, firm but basically kind, demanding but patient, a man who unwittingly influenced my ideas about skilled manual work and workers. No one could have replaced my father's love, that warm and mysterious internal bond, but Mr. Vonesch, just by being himself, lent the external framework that helped me mature, away from home.

The younger Karl, rough, unkind, outspoken, impinged little on me. He already was in his twenties, independent-minded but still living at home, at least some of the time. He too was a glazier in the shop where his father worked, but each one commuted on his own black motorcycle. He roared off; his father drove off. Even if one could afford a car, with gasoline tightly rationed during the war, a motorcycle provided the country commuter's wheels, sun, snow or rain.

The son had inherited his father's build and his strength from both of his parents. His relatively narrow face with an unremarkable nose and tightly closed mouth is hemmed in by large protruding ears and meets the world below a high forehead that ended under a lid of thick, neatly combed dark hair. His personality is summed up by his eyes, suspicious. They are set deep above forceful cheekbones and shadowed by dark brows. I didn't mind at all that he paid me little attention most of the time.

Once, Karl tested my courage and daring. He challenged me to ride with him to Zurich on the back seat of his motorcycle. I much rather would have ridden my bike or walked to the Forch to catch the streetcar, but did not dare to seem chicken. So, on the back seat I hopped, long before safety helmets, and held on - was it to Karl or to a handle? - with all my minor might. Rather than taking the usual gentler road by way of the Forch, he buzzed around the curves that took us more steeply from our perch down to Lake Zurich and from there at semi-safe speed along the level road to the city. It was a thrill ride all right, one that made me foreswear motorcycles for the rest of my life. No way would I climb on another one. His I-showed-you, didn't-I grin at the end of this wind-blown high-pressure adventure did nothing to narrow the gap between us.

Lucie, the Vonesch's daughter, about five years older than I, resembled in face her father more than her mother; her dark, wavy, disciplined hair reached down to her neck. Her womanly figure was that of an athlete; it conveyed strenght and discipline. Lucy was friendly, but not inclined to be an adoptive sister. She and I occasionally ventured on bike rides together, a lunch of bread and cheese tucked into our backpacks, she riding easily, I testing my endurance. Once we rode to the Kyburg, about 15 miles each way, not far from Winterthur. The castle, at least six centuries old, is ill-defined in my snapshot, but its turrets and roofs emerge recognizably among the crowns of trees at the end of a dirt road bordered by flowered meadows. By sheer coincidence, Erich, the older son of the Adlers, later characters in this chronicle, gave us, Joan and me, a souvenir cardboard model of the Kyburg when we were together in 1980. Its turrets, great halls, chapel, stables, fortified towers and enclosures, and even a tower from where to release pigeons, were to be cut out and assembled in three dimensions. We never did, but after resting quietly on a shelf for two decades, it transformed the fuzzy photo from the summer of 1940 into a resonant memory.

Lucy also also had a mischievous streak. One evening I was changing for bed; my shirt was off, my shorts were almost down to my knees. At that precise moment Lucie barged into my room. I dived under my blanket, my shorts around my ankles, and pulled it up to my chin, all in one second flat. She laughed like a rascal and taunted my red cheeks with: "What would you have to hide?" True enough, at eleven or twelve. I soon got over that prank and we got along well, like friendly strangers.

The Voneschs were not gentle people, neither were they pretentious or religious; they were the do-your-job, then-relax-if-there-is-time kind. They took work seriously, excelled at what they did and expected others, including me, to not be slouches either. If the calm was disturbed, it was by the junior Karl. Once, father and son nearly came to blows during some argument, but a worried Mrs. Vonesch managed to calm them down and ended up castigating both. The younger one was shown the door after this blow-up, but not permanently. When such storms blew, I just quietly shrank down in my chair and continued eating, if it was at mealtime. Else, I disappeared until distance or time had dimmed the sound. I never had been inundated with such torrents of poisoned words, such fevered arguments; it was a new, startling experience.

Mauser, her given name forgotten, was this boy's best friend. She resembled a German shepherd but was built more squarely and a bit lower to the ground. She hunted field mice with evident glee and expertise. When, lazing on the ground, front feet forward, ears erect, she spotted me in the distance on my way home from wherever I had been, she jumped to her paws, scurried about, nose to the ground, tail wagging. Within seconds, she came racing toward me, tail flying like a sail, a hapless field mouse dangling from her jaws. I patted and praised Mauser; she dropped the mouse at my feet and raced toward the house. She never ate the critters; it was her welcoming present for me.

Mauser not only offered me mice, but shared her food with me, unasked and unknowingly. We had no canned or dried dog food; these enriched, medicated, touted morsels did not exist for us. Our food, our supper, also filled her.

Was I too bashful to ask for bigger or more helpings to still my growing-boy appetite or were limits imposed by Mrs. Vonesch? I prefer to think I was too bashful. Whatever the reality, some days I felt underfed.

Each evening, after dinner, Mrs. Vonesch spooned Mauser's food into her large white enamelled dish and pile it well above the rim. On top sat chunks of meat and pieces of potato soaked in soup, sauce or gravy. As the designated dog feeder, I carried the dish out the kitchen door, down a flight of stairs and into the garage where Mauser impatiently wagged her tail. In that dim stairway, its walls lined with brooms and mops, out of sight of people and dog, I stopped a few seconds, lifted off a piece or two of meat or potato that did not touch the dish, stuffed the pieces into my mouth and then faced Mauser, my jaws racing. I set down the dish next to her pad, gave her a thank-you pat on the back and fresh water in a dish, all the while chewing and swallowing the morsels I had stolen. With empty mouth, wiped with the back of my hand, and slightly tarnished conscience, I reappeared in the kitchen, my middle satisfied. Mauser lost neither weight nor the sheen of her thick coat of tan and black hair. No one ever discovered my secret and the only one who might have suspected me lacked speech.

Mauser did squawk if I happened to yank her hair when I groomed her. I didn't do it on purpose, of course, but pulling comb and brush through her thick fur resulted in a jerk every now and then, especially in late spring when she was shedding gobs of hair. Being my buddy, she never became impatient with my slow progress; she liked being groomed much better than I liked doing it. It took so much time, may be a half hour each week, and the fine fuzz that escaped her pelt tickled my nose and made my cheeks feel itchy. Mauser and I would have been satified much sooner than Mr. Vonesch, the one who set the standard: no knots of hair from snout to tip of tail.

Mauser suffered just once while we lived together. Remembering still pains. We - the family, Mauser and I - were relaxing on the grassy ledge where the ground sloped downward to the northern meadow. Suddenly, Mauser raced downhill to chase a doe grazing its usual evening meal. Mr. Vonesch loudly whistled and yelled, but Mauser kept running. The deer leaped off, unharmed. When the dog finally came back, belly dragging, tail between her legs, Mr. Vonesch whipped her till she yelled. What in hell had he expected a dog to do when she saw a deer? I would not have dared to ask that question, but Mr. Vonesch sensed my silent disapproval. He had beaten my best friend. "A dog must obey, immediately. Period." She had been trained to not chase deer and no leeway was allowed. I never saw her chase another deer.

None of our cats were long-range boarders. They drifted in from somewhere, were welcomed by Mrs. Vonesch with a dish of milk and then stayed until they disappeared. Mauser never objected to them and left them alone. The foxes in the nearby woods were less easygoing. If the cat stuck her nose into the forest or hunted meadow mice a bit too far from home, they did not return for the next meal. So, no one became very attached to any one cat. Feeding them till they became food was simple charity.

Foods of the Voneschs

We ate well, not fancily. Mrs. Vonesch ran a *Gute Bürgerliche Küche*, as a restaurant might have advertised, good middle class home cooking. It was not that different from what I had eaten at home, except no Friday night Einmachsuppe with Berches, that harbinger of Sabbath and no Schmalz on rye, fragrant, delicious yellow rendered chicken fat spread on a slice of bread and perked up with a sprinkle of salt. Instead, I had to swallow some novelties, most readily, one that gagged me.

The first time I smelled it when I came home from school, the odor nearly made me puke. It was a strange new smell, totally unappetizing. Soon, a big bowl piled high with a steaming heap of yellow glop sat in the middle of the table. I tested it, as I knew I would have to, just like at home. It tasted awful and the grainy texture didn't help. Keeping that first fork-full down was all I could do. I made no secret of my dislike for whatever it was; I couldn't have. The muscles around my mouth had involuntarily contracted and twisted themselves into that this-is-godawful shape that spoke volumes to all around the table.
"*Was isch das?*"
"Polenta, corn meal. You'll get used to it. Just eat it!"

Not only did I get used to it, before long, polenta became one of my favorite foods, which was just as well, because Mrs. Vonesch served it quite often. Now, I cook polenta and eat it with pleasure once I have infused it with flavor. The intrusive blandness of polenta is an asset; it's a hungry sponge for any rich and flavorful sauce or gravy.

Unlike with polenta, I struck up an immediate love affair with Birchermüesli, a quintessentially Swiss health food that has been converted into an expensive fad food by diet obsessed Americans. Bircher was a Swiss health guru of the late 1800s who promoted the salutory effects of a thick mix of raw oat flakes, raisins, sliced almonds and freshly chopped apples soaked in cool full-fat milk, into a national dish. And delicious it is, for breakfast or as a snack. It should be thick, so it piles on the spoon, not runny, with a flat surface. A diet food all right, but, if composed properly, not likely a help in deflating spare tires.

Vegetarian might be delicious for breakfast or a snack, but there is no satisfying substitute for meat for muscle workers or growing kids, especially during the white season. Beef and pork were scarce and rationed during these war years and chicken was a holiday food. Mr. Vonesch, eager for meat and not bound by tradition, had discovered that cows grow a parts that was not rationed: the udder. Mrs. Vonesch was surprised - *das kann ma esse*? that's edible? - but not at all discombubulated when that squishy soft ball of red flesh, minus teats, slitheredout of the wrapping paper. She grabbed it, cut up the udder into stew-size pieces, and promply converted it into a tasty grizzle-free stew. How often we ate udder stew, I don't remember, but it never appeared on any menu I encountered beyond the Vonesch's kitchen.

How often did we eat horse meat stew? Not frequently; none of us appreciated its sweetish flavor. Besides, by the time a horse turned into meat, you could cook it all day and it still would be chewy. Mrs. Vonesch asked for it only when rationing stamps for "real" meat and sausage had been spent before the end of the month and she tired of meatless meals or odd-ball parts of animals. Better sweetish meat than no meat.

Aside from cooking on a demanding wood stove, Mrs. Vonesch also conjured up fine thick soups, passively. I could not believe it worked, but it did. She brought chunks of meat, potatoes, vegetables, barley and water to a boil in a big pot. Then, she moved the hot, lidded, two-handled pot into a low wooden chest with a hole the size of the pot at its center. This cavity was surrounded by thick insulation, rags on bottom, sides and, once the lid was lowered, on top. A few hours later, at dinner time, the fragrant mix steamed in the soup bowls in front of us. Many years later and not so long ago, that magic cooker reappeared before my eyes when stories and ads in newspapers touted the virtues of crock pots, now electric. Definitely déja vue.

An enticing aroma first wafted under my nose at the Voneschs. Roasting marroni, edible chestnuts, emanted those vapors. For me, chestnuts had been toys, nuts to throw at friends or to thread on strings to make he-boy necklaces. Never before had I encountered their edible cousins. That first time, I had watched as the adults and Lucie sat around the kitchen table on a winter's night, each one with a paring knife making short top-to-bottom cuts into the flat side of the outer husk. Once they were scored, Mrs. Vonesch spread the nuts on a cookie sheet and slid it on a shelf in the hot *Kachelofen*, a marvel faced with tile. The appetizing aroma quickly escaped into the kitchen and, after about ten minutes more, the roasted marroni were ready, their reddish-brown shell tinged with black. We wanted to eat the kernels as hot possible, for maximum flavor, but first we had to extract them from the blistering husk and papery skin. If roasted to perfection, the skin slipped off easily; if not, we scratched it off with our finger nails and tried to keep our finger tips from being singed. The delicately nutty flavor of the hot marroni, steamed in their own moisture inside the husk, was reward enough for red-tipped digits.

The apogee of marronidom was marroni pudding. The naked, roasted chestnuts are simmered in rich milk until they are soft enough to be ground through a ricer. Mrs. Vonesch's strong arms and hands kept circling until she had a bowl full of tannish-white chestnut puree. More milk, some sugar - not much, it was rationed - more simmering, until the puree was smooth, fragrant and superb. Definitely a Sunday dessert, especially when topped with a crown of whipped cream. On my very first return visit to Swizerland, in the fall of 1980, Joan and I savored the concoction at a sidewalk cafe on the Limmatquai in Zurich. Except, along this strollers' haven, where young and those of any age sit, sip, savor, and watch the world pass by, the treat is served in tall sundae glasses as vermicelli, little worms in Italian, the strings piled high and artfully looped round and round to a peak topped, of course, with a dab of whipped cream. Mm, delightful!

Mrs. Vonesch also introduced me to a jam that rivalled any others I ever had spread on a slice of bread. *Quittenmarmelade*, quince jam. I never had heard of or seen this furry, hard, yellow, apple-shaped fruit before. The white flesh is hard hard, the texture of sand and its astringency curls the tongue. Not a fruit to eat out of hand; cooking it slowly sweetened with sugar and helped with a bit of water works a miracle. In an hour or two, a thick, luxuriously claret red jam is ready for any royal slice of bread.

In spring, soon after sun and rain had cleared the meadows of snow and the winter's chill had receded, Lucie and I played rabbit in the meadows near the house. We bent low and scanned the ground for dandelion greens, that harbinger of spring. We plucked leaves no longer than an index finger's length until we had enough to lace a salad. These sprouts, perky and tender, were a tonic of old after the long winter nights and overcast days, the season when fresh greens were scarce. The little leaves of this weed far outshine the farm-grown dandelion greens, large, tough and bitter.

House, hearth, ground and underground

I had never paid much attention to the details of our flat in Mindelheim, how clean it was, how the floors were shined or how it stayed warm in winter. I never had to think about what made it work. Somehow the floors were shined, the furniture dusted, the fire in the stove was started and kept going; the heat in winter just was there. All these without my help or bother. If we needed food, someone bought it at a grocer or butcher, from a farmer on the Marktplatz below our windows, or the truck gardener at the edge of town. Here, out in the country, at the Kinderheim Rütibühl, I became enmeshed in the house and the garden, the inside and outside. It wasn't just a place where I lived; I had to help keep it livable and it wasn't always how I liked to spend my time.

My room, on the second floor, was simple - a plain wood-framed bed that jutted out from the wall next to the window, a chair, and a wardrobe to house my clothes. Here were the tangible ties to home, to my family: my clothes, blankets, feather bed with its pure white cover, and my special pillow. It was large, nearly flat, and filled not with down but with the hair of horses, I think from their tails. Dr. Fries, my best friend's father, had prescribed it for some vanished reason. That pillow stayed with me until Aunt Helen finally confiscated and discarded it a while after I had arrived in Detroit, more than a decade of wear later.

Just like at home, the kitchen, ample and L-shaped, was my favorite indoor space.

As I enter from the hallway the four-burner wood stove stands to the right; next to it, around the corner to the left, rises the shiny, dark green *Kachelofen* , the tile oven, of which more later. A door near its left edge leads into the living room. A large window on the side opposite the wood stove sheds ample light on the large kitchen/dining table in the center. In the nook of the short arm of the L stands another stove, a novelty for me. It's powered with electricity! Never had I seen anything like it. It was as if the Vonesch were bragging about how the Swiss had electrified the country, right to the edge of the forest in the hills.

The living room was nothing special, except for the main attraction, the lazy half of the *Kachelofen*. It was fed from the kitchen through a large square mouth flush with the wall and closed with a heavy hinged iron door decorated with adjustable vents to control the enthusiasm of the flames. A couple or three logs started mid-evening still would glow enough next morning to start that day's fire with a little help from kindling wood. A shelf above the fire box supported the tray on which we roasted chestnuts. The dark green shiny tiles that sheathed the firebrick inside were unadorned, unlike those in some ritzy homes and castles. Not fancy, but efficient, this Kachelofen spread its glowless warmth in the kitchen, the living room and even in the master bedroom upstairs.

It was in the living room, where on a cold winter's night Lucie and I vied to warm our rears on the one-bottom-sized shelf tucked bench-like in the squared U of the the Kachelofen. If Lucy's mother desired some bottom heat, we young ones patiently, more or less, waited our turn. The Vonesch men never competed for the priviledge; it was unmanly. As for me, still a boy, to sit in that nook, book in hand or just dreaming of nothing, was bliss; my bottom, my innards, my legs and feet warmed to cozy comfort.

Opposite this winter wonder, a large French door opened out into the linoleum-floored veranda, lighted by a string of windows set above white-painted wood panels, the sills about three feet off the floor. On a clear cool-season day, the low southern sun turned this recreation room into a cozy greenhouse and even warmed the living room. Chairs, a utility rattan couch and a solid card table were the furnishings. When the warm, clearing Foehn blew from the south and the windows were open, the crescent of the Alps seemed to be anchored just beyond the southern moraine, the twin of ours on the far side of Lake Zurich down in the valley. What a view, what a gorgeous view!

Bathrooms were bathrooms, not fashion statements, but two we had were fashionable compared to ours at home: They sported odern flush toilets, not a straight tube down to the septic tank. These Swiss were advanced compared to us in Mindelheim, no doubt about it, even out in the country.

The garage/workshop penetrated the hill, partly below the kitchen. Mr. Vonesch used it as neither display case for adult toys nor a warren for junk. This is where winter's heat was stored. The entire wall to the left of the double door was lined with stacks of fire wood when I arrived in October, half of it as fat logs a little shorter than the depth of the tile oven. Some of the logs had been split into quarters or pieces the thickness of a man's wrist. Shorter and thinner wood for firing the cook stove made a small stack and a large wood box held the kindling. All was neat, even attractive, ready for a long cold winter.

Cylinders of *Reisig*, the brushwood used to kindle a fire in the tile oven, reached half way up to the ceiling over half of the opposite wall. Next to these stacks, a pile of the loose stuff, branches and twigs, neither ordered nor a mess, had been set down with thought after having been hauled from the forest. Taming this pile was one of my early chores. A sturdy framework set on the level concrete floor supported a solid wooden base, about desk height. At each end of this base and in the middle were fastened rigid metal half circles, like a large airy gutter. The upper half circle was attached to its lower twin at hinges and two or three longitudinal metal bars connected the ends of each of the two sets of half circles. Finally, a flat metal bar with a handle in the middle connected the open sides of the top half circle with each other. Mr. Vonesch opened this hollow cylinder, letting the top half flop to the back side, grabbed an armful of brush and laid it into the lower half, shuffling and squeezing the branches so they lined up as parallel as possible to the long direction of the frame. Then, another arm full and a third. Now, the bottom half moon was more than full. Next, he lowered the moving half, pulled on the handle, and compressed the brush until the handle snapped into a latch. With the twigs now tamed, he ran twine around each end of the bundle, a few inches from the ends. A little trimming of stray twigs, and the tied bundle was ready to be released and stacked, ready to be shoved into the oven.

I had watched intently and now it was my turn. After a bit of help and a few "this way, not that way" admonitions, I was on my own. It was work, for sure not play, not hard work, but it did require a modicum of muscle and judgement to keep stray branches from scratching my face as I moved a bunch from stack to binder; also, if the bundles were packed too tightly, they burned too slowly, if too loose, they would have vanished before the igniting the big logs. I didn't mind this chore when I had to assemble just a few bundles at a time, but a couple of hours at a stretch became a drag. I was in the garage by myself, with the door closed and a cold wind whistling outside, just Mauser for company, and that only if she wasn't hanging around Mrs. Vonesch or otherwise lazing upstairs, in warmth.

Cornered next to the stacked Reisig and out of drafts was Mauser's bed, a collection of gunny sacks filled with hay.

Garden tools, snow shovels, brooms, saws, sleds and skis, and the miscellanea that help keep a house and garden running were neatly hung on racks or stacked on shelves along the hillside wall. And, somewhere stood the stump on which I chopped wood.

The garage was my gym and Mr. Vonesch my personal trainer. Not that I aspired to athletic fame, it's just that the chores I had shoved on me happened to be body builders. Splitting logs for the fireplace and stove led the way. Mr. Vonesch set a log on the stump, lifted the ax with one hand as if it where a dinner knife, crashed it into the center of the circle, and presto, where there had been one whole, there now lay two halves. My turn. I set the log on end, grabbed the ax handle with both of my hands, raised myself to my toes, and then crashed the blade into the log. I was in luck, it split at the first try. Mr. Vonesch warned me about the hazards of a sharp ax, watched me split one more log and then left me and a dozen logs alone. If the first whack failed to crack the log, I had to extract the blade by yanking and wiggling it back and forth before I turned the log unsplit end up to give it another whack, lined up as closely as I could muster with the split on the now lower end. Most of the time, I succeeded with two tries; frustration took over when the blade stuck in a knot and wouldn't budge. Then I had to pull, push, and finally slam the ax and log down onto the stump, upside down. It was a damn nuisance and sweat generator. At first, the ax seemed impossibly heavy; gradually, as my arm muscles strengthened and I grew taller, the chore became easier and the ax and I even became friends. Eventually, splitting wood became my favorite chore. That rush in the muscles felt exhilirating and any frustrations I may have had drained right down my arm, into my hand and out into the ax handle and ended up splintered and insignificant on the big hardwood stump that stopped the ax. Maybe, just maybe, by the time my parents would come to pick me up, I would be nearly as strong as my father.

At the time I wasn't one bit flattered that Mr. Vonesch thought there wasn't a job I couldn't do. He next taught me how to wield a one-man saw to shorten small logs destined for the tile oven or stove as they lay on a saw horse. I being short and not a junior Hercules, the saw kept wobbling side to side instead of steadily cutting through the wood; very frustrating and also embarrassing in front of myself and, especially when Mr. Vonesch watched. I wanted to be able to do it right, like a man. By and by I managed to control the sharp-toothed beast and saw with abandon. At the end of the first winter, I actually could detect a bulge on my right arm, one that looked mildly impressive in the mirror, not remotely like Mr. Vonesch's, but satisfying just the same.

The men, the two Karls, buzzed through big logs with a lumberjacks' two-man saw as if the wood were cheese. Once, they challenged me to grab the handle on one end of the saw. The younger Karl, on the other end, started out slowly. Before long, we gained "normal" speed, normal for him, not for me, short and slight. He speeded up; the saw pulled me forward instead of I pulling it back and then, after another pull and no push, with a good laugh all around, I watched enviously as the Vonesch men showed off their muscled coordination.

Mr. Vonesch must have trained me well: I never injured myself, either with the saw, the two-handed ax or with the hatchet I used to produce kindling. The record still stands, 60 years later, after years of chopping wood on my block into kindling and chunks to start and feed a fire on cook-outs in the mountains.

While I was becoming accustomed to my *in loco parentis* family my new surroundings and my chores, my parents and grandmother fretted about me. Within a week, I had a letter from my parents. How are you? What are you doing? Write!!! Write at least once a week! I was busy, not only around the house, but I also had started school. Besides, I hated to write. Eventually I did write, weekly at first, but not as conscientiously later on. Lack of money for postage was no excuse for me, because my parents always sent international reply coupons or dual postcards, one half for one direction, the other half, prepaid, for the return. Sometimes I didn't write for two weeks or more; I did not comprehend that my lines on paper were a lifeline for my parents. I came to profoundly regret that negligence, after it was too late. Not knowing the future, I am forced to regret the past.

Time to move out into the sunshine, into rain or snow.

To the north of the house, beyond the gravelled driveway, a swath of grass flowed down the slope toward a farmer's meadow below. To the east and south another meadow bordered the vegetable garden. Up-slope of the garden stood a long wooden bench shaded by beeches, a pleasant spot for resting, conversing, and day-dreaming at day's end, if there was time. A grassy rock-dotted slope rose toward the west and stopped at the edge of the forest.

This forest provided the firewood for cooking and warmth, the logs I split. The Karls sawed big logs into movable pieces, hauled them on a low wooden cart and then stacked them to dry in the garage; I dragged the brushwood, armful after armful, I would later bundle.

In back of the house, toward the woods and out of nose range of the kitchen, at least a half dozen hutches housed our rabbits, big-toothed, twitchy-nosed, long-eared, with silky soft, shiny brown mottled fur. They were Belgian something or other and quite large. Some were bucks, some were does. A while after a buck had been moved into a hutch with a doe, a litter of little ones wiggled around in a furry nest the mother had assembled in a corner from the nearly white fur she had plucked from her belly. It all was so new and fascinating. Before, the only rabbit I had known was a dead rabbit, naked, cut up and cooked. Ours also were part of the food chain: First we fed them; then, when they were the right size, we fed on them, stewed with cream and herbs. I still am grateful that Mr. Vonesch never roped me into helping with the bloody steps between the hutch and the pot.

What was it, my immaturity, lack of curiosity or ignorance so deep that I never even thought of questioning myself or any one else about just what happened between the time the buck was let into the doe's cage and the litter showed up some morning? I had noticed the lively encounters between the two, but bunnies were expected to be friendly with each other. No one enlightened me; neither had I asked. At eleven, my ignorance mattered to no one, not even me. How could it have? I didn't know I was ignorant.

Outside, inside, every side supplied me with chores. Who had done all this work before I landed at the Kinderheim? No other kids were there when I had arrived.

Chores, damnable chores

Some chores perfectly matched the full negativity of the dictionary definition : "... a task or duty; *esp*: one that is dull, difficult, or disagreeable...". Some just swallowed time; they neither consumed much energy, taught skills nor built muscles. Attacking a piece of potential firewood with ax or hatchet was the one chore I never resented; it built confidence and muscle. Polishing the stove top also may have built muscle, but I hated it, hated and resented it, each time, undiminished.

The easily stainable, unforgivingly hard steel top was about twice the expanse of the average modern stove. Four burner holes, each covered with three or four concentric steel rings and a central cap crossed with a little hand-hold divided the top into quarters. Removing all the rings opened up a hole for big pots, removing only the center cap allowed for small pots; keeping all in place permitted simmering if the fire was kept small. Mrs. Vonesch's cooking skill was tested not only in the culinary arts, but also in building and babying the soft- or hard-wood fire so it would neither flash nor die.

However large the fire that consumed the wood, the kind of black goo that clings to the bottom of a pot over a wood fire at a picnic also seeped out between the burner rings and stained the top, joining any food that might have splattered and become fused to the hot steel. These stains had to be removed; they were a stigma on cleanliness of Mrs. Vonesch. She wiped and scraped the stove every day, once it had cooled, But, far too often, whatever the interval, the stove top had to be returned to its pristine state, with steel wool and elbow grease.

Mrs. Vonesch demonstrated the proper technique: bear down and rub; bear down and rub, brush off slivers of steel wool, bear down and rub till all stains have vanished. For her it was relatively simple: She outmeasured me by several inches and outweighed me by at least 30 pounds. To scrub back by the splash board, I had to stand on a stool, stretch, and bear down well ahead of my head; just holding my head above the stove was work, especially since the stool tended to tip backward as I leaned forward. After a time or two, I just kneeled on the front of the stove as I scrubbed the rear. Still, it was a pain. I was finished only after the entire top had that like-new sheen. It was a rotten job I could not escape. I never quite forgave Mrs. Vonesch for having indentured me to that stove top. It would have cooked just as well with a spot here and there.

The same kind of infernal stainable steel topped the electric stove. It saw less action than the wood stove, so it had to be polished only rarely and then, to my relief, it was Mrs. Vonesch who took care of this, her baby. But even this stove caused me memorable trouble.

I never had even seen an electric stove before; I could not understand how the four black round iron plates could be hot and heat anything without visible heat. Nothing burned; nothing turned red hot. Mrs. Vonesch warned me, but I did not believe her when she warned me that the plates were very hot when turned on. I wqas not convinced. I touched a plate with confidence. What pain! That plate was fiery hot! Had I ever been wrong! The tip of my poor index finger was blistered and sore for several days, soothed with a dab of salad oil. The pain also scorched a lesson into my head: Listen to experience and don't plunge with ignorant self confidence.

Mrs. Vonesch was just as fussy about her floors as with the stove tops. Most of the floors in the house were wood, with rugs in the living room and small ones in front of the beds. I had nothing to do with these. My floor - I did not ask for it; it was thrust one me - was the spread of dark green linoleum in the glassed-in veranda. Mrs. Vonesch did the waxing, but I was delegated to run the *Blocher*, the polisher. This gadget had a long wood handle attached to a heavy iron plate by means of a swivel connection; stiff bristles somehow were attached to the bottom of the plate. Once the wax had set, my hands had to attach themselves to the handle so I could shove the polisher forth and pull it back over the floor, rhythmically and steadily, square foot by square foot. That was not enough. After this first run, I had to glide the Blocher over the floor with a soft rag under the brushes until the surface glistened. This grind in the service of household pride wasn't nearly as bad as slaving over the stove tops. I figured that all that weighted pushing and pulling would toughen my arm muscles, expand my chest and so help me change from being short and weak to just being short.

Why did I have to shine my shoes? They carried me just as well dull, even dirty. There I was out on the veranda on a muggy pre-thunderstorm kind of day that slows the mind but intensifies odors. I already had brushed my shoes at the open window so that any dirt would drop outside, not on the floor, and was ready to smear on the polish. It was in one of those idiotically designed circular metal cans where one turns a lever and, as one turns, the lower half pushes against a ridge near the top of the container while the other half pushes against a ridge on the lid, lifting it off. Unlike now, when lid and bottom have rolled edges, they were raw. The lid suddenly popped and somehow cut my finger. "*Verdammt*!" The wide cut dripped blood. Mrs. Vonesch hustled with bandage and tincture of iodine. She opened the little bottle, dripped some on a wad of cotton and the next thing I knew, I woke up sprawled on the floor. Seeing my blood and smelling the iodine on this stale afternoon had knocked me out and down. Nothing really hurt, other than my pride. I'm still squeamish about blood, not just my own.

Lettuce, cabbage, carrots and some forgotten crops prospered in the vegetable garden. Keeping the weeds in check was not my favorite job, but it was the fertilizer that came to bug me. My waste, everyone's digested waste that dropped in the modern toilet, ended up in a hole in the ground, just like at home. There, I just had taken care of my needs and never thought further. Here, in Rütibühl, we sprinkled this nutrient-rich night soil next to the vegetables while they still were small, well before harvest. Recycling, ancient version.

The septic tank was a deep, wide hole in the ground off the west side of the house. Heavy planks kept people and unwary animals from falling into the muck. When the plants needed fertilizer, someone removed one board and then I filled a long-handled dipper, like a gargantuan soup ladle, with the odiferous liquid and emptied it into a galvanized sprinkling can. I tried to keep the stuff off my shoes or naked feet, depending on the temperture. My nose was defenseless. I then carried the can, spray nozzle removed, to the garden where I poured a little of the swill around each plant, trying not to splash any onto the leaves.

Was it this recycling or some other intersection with nature that lodged intestinal worms in my guts? When I first saw these strange whitish strings wiggle in the toilet bowl, I nearly puked and was scared. What's going on inside me? Are they eating me? I had to tell Mrs. Vonesch about this startling dicovery. What had I done? What was wrong with me? I never had heard of parasites. Mrs. Vonesch called Aunt Jenny. I wonder just how she explained the situation. I wish I could have heard the conversation and seen Aunt Jenny's face. Anyway, I was sent to a doctor somewhere in Zurich. Whatever he prescribed was worthless; the wigglers kept showing up. Enter Swiss folk medicine, Vonesch version.

I was condemned to a 24-hour fast, nothing solid, no milk, no juice, nothing but onions. Not cooked onions; onions raw and strong, nothing else. For one whole day and night. I have no idea how many onions I ate to keep starvation at bay; however many it was, they did their job. They cured me forever. Score one for folk medicine.

Suffering through the onion cure was bad enough, but I wasn't even excused from any of my regular chores, although my stomach begged for real food and my inflated intestines threatened to make me airborne. "Why should you be excused? You're not sick." True, but heartless. Maybe I would have felt even sorrier for myself had I just been laying about imagining the action behind my belly button.

At least I didn't have to clean out the rabbit hutches; Mr. Vonesch took care of that smelly job. I just had to feed them. Nothing to it, from fall to spring. I grabbed a bunch of hay, opened the door of the hutch, shoved it in front of the resident nibbler to keep him or her from hopping out of the cage, shut the door, turned the latch, and that was it, one after the other, until the whole clutch was fed. Once the sward of meadow near the house had greened and the grasses and clover had grown six inches or so, these tender greens became rabbit food. We could not just let the beasts graze, because they would have hopped off in all directions, ending up not only fed but as fox food.

Who cut the feed before I arrived on the scene? Once he had my extra pair of hands, Mr. Vonesch harnessed them to mow the greens, with a sickle. "Never use it barefoot, unless you are looking for sliced toes. Never touch the cutting edge with your fingers till you know how; it's razor sharp." I never even had been close to a sickle before and if I did see one used, I had paid no attention to how arm, hand and sickle worked together. The rules absorbed and scared, I bent down gingerly, my right hand gripping the handle, hoping my shoes were sturdy enough to keep the blade from slicing my toes. "Crouch down; your rear won't split. You got to crouch down, or you can't cut parallel to the ground. If you don't, you waste grass that could have been cut and you may hit a stone and dull the blade." I lowered my rear. "That's better, but don't grip the handle so tightly, or you'll get tired too quickly; just hold it firmly." Sweat beads wet my brown on this cool late May afternoon, but I gradually got into the swing of the tool. "Don't swing quite so wide or you'll hit your toes with the tip of the blade." I backed off a bit and steadily developed the proper rythm; after a few days I even managed to cut the grass and clover parallel to the ground so the stubble patch was almost level. It looked neat and I was proud of myself.

Many days during the green season, I mowed a swath of juicy feed, loaded it into a wheel barrow, hauled it to the hutches and shoved a bunch in front of each one of the sniffing bucks and does. Hay was food, grass a delicacy. They nibbled away at it as fast as their jaws could move and stopped only when every green sprout had vanished. These rabbits looked so soft and shiny, so huggable, but hug them I never did. After all, you don't hug a friend and then savor her in a sauce a month later.

After few weeks, Mr. Vonesch trusted me enough to teach me how to sharpen the sickle's blade when use had dulled the edge. I held the handle with my left hand so the curved sickle blade, like a sliver of the moon, was close to vertical, point end down. The lower end of the sharpening stone, rounded, long and narrow, like a double-pointed cone easily fit into my right fist as I stroked its upper end along one side of the blade and then along the other to smooth nicks made by tough stems or by stray stones hidden by the greenery. These were not rare, because our ridge, a glacial leftover, frost-heaved stones every winter and early spring as the soil alternately froze and thawed.

Mowing rabbit food turned into a routine chore fairly soon, one I did not mind most of the time; it tested my skill to cut the grass smoothly, not my toes or fingers, smoothly or otherwise.

When the sickle blade was seriously dull, Mr. Vonesch sharpened it himself. He held it against the narrow surface of a vertically rotating disk-shaped sharpening stone with a hole and axel in the center. The stone, maybe a foot or more in diameter, was propelled like an old sewing machine. A foot pedal hooked to gears and rods converted foot pumping energy into a circular whirl of the disk. Mr. Vonesch's hands skillfully moved the blade from side to side, at just the right angle and with just the right pressure, until no nick deflected the rays of the sun. Too steep an angle, and the edge would be too thick; too shallow an angle and it would be too thin and weak. I was glad not to be overly skilled.

We did it only once while I lived at the Kinderheim Rütibühl, but that was enough. Out here in the country, up on a hill, we not only disposed of our own waste, we also collected our own drinking water. I had never thought about water as coming from some place specific, other than a faucet or a fountain. It just was there. One day, Mr. Vonesch recruited his son, daughter and me. We headed up the rise behind the house to a large concrete box stuck partly into the north-facing slope. I had seen it before, but never paid any attention to it. Mr. Vonesch opened a large iron hatch and climbed a vertical steel ladder, bolted to the side, down into the darkness, the gloom broken only by the glow of his lantern and the light that seeped in through the hatch. The rest of us followed him, I gingerly; I never before had to negotiate a vertical ladder. We were in a cavern high enough so I could stand up straight, but not the rest; it was the settling chamber of our cistern that Mr. Vonesch already had drained. We stood in a layer of wet sand and muck that had settled out over time and now was drawn into the water pipes.

This heavy goo had to be cleared out. Mr. Vonesch surveyed the dim scene, climbed back out again and came back with straight-edged shovels and a couple of buckets, each attached to a sturdy rope. The son climbed out and the rest of us filled bucket after bucket that he, muscle man that he was, roped from the deep and emptied into a wheelbarrow, to be dumped near the woods. The work was clammy and no fun at all. Tempers had grown a bit tense from the strain of work, the murky light and the confined space. We miners either were too slow or too fast in filling the buckets, filled them too much or too little and got in each others way.

When Mr. Vonesch declared victory, well after I thought the floor was clean enough, beer for the men, milk for Lucie and me and rye bread and cheese all around, up in the sunshine, rewarmed our bones and restored our good humor. Yes, once was enough. The Voneschs could do anything, but there was a limit on what I wanted to learn.

With all that work, I ate like the proverbial horse, the food on my plate and the morsels I pinched from Mauser.

Even the food we ate didn't come easily, like from a supermarket around the corner or down the street, with aisle after aisle of goods, carts to hold them and a car to haul them home. Where we lived, meadows, pastures, woodlands, fields of potatoes, orchards and vinyards reached into the distance across the undulating countryside. The nearest mom and pop grocery store was miles away, down the steep hill in Herrliberg, near the lake or, in the other direction, in Zurich. So where did we buy our soap and sugar, flour and spices and the myriad of other goods that clutter cupboards and shelves in a pantry and kitchen? At Migros, the grocery on wheels.

The folks in the scattered hamlets and isolated farms, in valleys and on hills always had to travel miles, often by horse- or ox-drawn wagon, to haul in what they themselves could not produce. Once they reached a store, prices were high and choices few. Comes the brilliant idea of Gottlieb Duttweiler, founder of Migros: bring the grocery store to the people. In 1925 he rolled out vans that anticipated modern roaming catering trucks most of which infuse their wake with the sickening smell of stale grease. The Migros trucks did not stink; they hauled neither hot dogs nor tacos, neither hamburgers nor french fries, no Pepsi or Coke, but sugar and rice, pasta and soap, coffee and coconut oil. Duttweiler's trucks criss-crossed the countryside, had designated stops, and schedules as fixed as those of Swiss trains. But even the Migros truck did not come to Rütibühl; its nearest stop was at the Forch, at good two miles away.

When Mrs. Vonesch told me what Lucie and I were to do that November Saturday morning, I was incredulous. A grocery on wheels, and we had to ride there on our bikes to fetch all that stuff on her list? A double yes.

Lucie and I pumped up the tires of our bikes hard enough so they would not budge when we squeezed them between our thumbs and index fingers. Then, each one of us shouldered a backpack, mine large enough to reach down to my butt. It wasn't any larger than Lucie's, but I was shorter than she, by several inches. Off we rode, first a little bit down hill and then on the level, eastward along the wide, tree-lined gravel path that gently curved a half mile or so between meadows to the hamlet of Rütibühl. There, we joined the narrow paved road that curved west and then wiggled its way to the Forch. On the right rose the wooded back of the Pfannenstiel; to the left a gentle slope led to the flat, tree-dotted meadow whose opposite edge bordered the rise dominated by our house, a view that disappeared around the next bend. We, Lucie and I, rode side by side and chatted about whatever happened to enter our minds that day, but never girl-boy talk.

At the Forch, we leaned our bikes against some trees, sat on one of the benches at the streetcar stop and waited with a dozen or so others for that, to me, mysterious vehicle to arrive. Right on time, the gleaming, aluminum-clad, snub-nosed truck had worked its way up the hill from Zurich and rolled to a stop in front of my amazed eyes. It looked more like a bus without windows than a truck. The shoppers gathered closer. Chatter among friends and acquaintences kept flowing as they fell in line next to the grocery bus. The driver and his assistent opened the doors of the cab and climbed down from their seats. I watched intently on what would come next. Lucie had tried to explain to me how the system works, but my imagination was a bit slow; the whole business seemed so unlikely.

Now, the neatly uniformed driver pulls down hinged aluminum shutters on the customer side of the truck, so opening up a whole series of cupboard-like chutes that spilled out onto a shelf, the top side being the inside surface of the lower shutter. Each of the chutes reveals its particular secret, a bag of flour, a bag of sugar, a bundle of soap bars. There must have been a dozen or more of the chutes. Lucie pulls out a bag of flour, and presto, another bag slides down; the same with a bag of sugar. Whatever she and others pull out onto the shelf immediately is followed by an endless-seeming succession of identical siblings. Amazing and mysterious. Where do all these offspring come from? I have to find out. I ask and the driver lets me have a peek behind the intriguing front after the cluster of customers had thinned. There, in the space where passengers would sit were this a bus, the assistant, a neatly uniformed women, sidles back and forth in a narrow corridor, pulling bags and boxes from shelves, reloading each chute as its supply dwindled. Very, very clever, the genius who thought of this rolling grocery store and designed its ingenious interior.

Lucie paid the driver and handed over the requisite rationing coupons for sugar, flour and whatever else was restricted. He tucked the coupons and bills into a train conductor's satchel hanging from one of his shoulders. The coins he slid into those little tubes for change suspended from his street car conductor's money-changing belt. We now set our backpacks on the shelf and stuffed them with the groceries Lucie had bought. A weight for Lucie, a weight for me, with an extra one for her, because she was bigger and stronger. I cinch down the the lid of my backpack and heave the load onto my back. What a weight! Besides, something edgy shoves itself into the middle of my back. Off with the backpack; I shuffle the goods so only rounded bags will touch my back. This time, nothing pokes me between the shoulder blades; back on our bikes and off we are, toward home.

The road home unrolled much more slowly than during the crisp ride to the Forch. I trailed behind Lucie, saying little; I couldn't waste energy talking. Once home in the kitchen, I seemed to float off the ground after I had escaped that heavy backpack. A snack of rye bread dunked into creamy milk restored my equilibrium.

We did not do all the shopping at the Migros coach, just for dry staples. The Vonesch men carried lists of needs as they rode off to work on their motor cycles. After work, they returned loaded with meat, vegetables, fruit, and whatever else the Migros truck did not carry, clothes bags strapped to the back of their cycles or riding in their backpacks.

Milk we bought, too. But, that story a bit later.

Lucie shared the shopping with me every now and then, but many times, after that first joint outing, I pedalled to the Forch by myself minding the countryside to see what was going on in the fields and on the farms. On the way back, I hardly noticed; my eyes focussed on the road ahead of me as I ground along, toward home.

The Forch moved closer to the Kinderheim Rütibühl after the snow flakes flew and rendered the road impassable for a boy on a bicycle. When the powdery white had buried the meadows, there was no need to follow the snaking road to the Forch. I put on the backpack with the the shopping list in a pocket, strapped on my skis, gripped the poles with my gloved hands and whooshed right down the snowy slope toward the fenceless meadow below. By then, a month or a bit more after I had arrived at the Kinderheim, I knew just where I wanted to meet the road again, to the right of a farm house and its fences. I clambered up the embankment, sideways, pushing with my poles, and then glided on the packed snow of the road until the next fenceless meadow invited a short cut. Not only did I save distance, but as I swept across the glistening surface that no one had disturbed, I imagined being a junior pioneer exploring the unknown in the midst of winter's beauty. White cushions weighed down the branches of naked trees and bushes, were piled high on roofs of barns and houses, and snow-white capes draped the conifers of the Pfannenstiel forest.

On the way home, my nose followed the long road and the snow squeeked as one ski led forward and then the other, again and again, the load getting heavier, until I landed by the door to the garage, the last hundered yards accompanied by the barking and tail-wagging Mauser. My uncertain skiing skills kept me from scooting down slopes and scissoring up others with a load of groceries on my back. How would I extricate myself from backpack and skis if I fell down in deep snow, with no one in sight or within shouting distance to help, with no Saint Bernard, with or without a little keg of brandy, to rescue me?

These shopping excursions were close to enjoyment when powdery white overlayed the meadows and was packed crisp on the road. But, when the Fœhn blew from the southern sky and the snow became ideal for making chilled missiles and pot bellied men, then my old skis slid reluctantly, even when newly waxed, making progress a labor, but not one of love. As winter faded and slush covered the road, the Vonesch men took care of all of the grocery shopping, because the road was too mucky for skis or bikes.

The milk we drank arrived neither by bike nor ski, but on foot; on my feet. After a trial with one of the Voneschs, I set out by myself for the cluster of Rütibühl, about a half mile distant, a lidded can with hinged handles in each hand. Having been a small-town boy, not a country kid, as I now was, this at thrice-weekly traverse of open country where wildlife roamed free, brought out the chicken in me. The first late afternoon trek in November by myself lay heavily on me. The sun had set and the old leafless trees that guarded the road on both sides were ghostly silhouettes against the moonlit sky in the eerie silence. Would a fox sneak up on me? Would some farmer's dog come silently running? Was there anything live out there in the near night I did not even know about? I walked in the middle of the path and sang the few songs I knew, one after the other, as loudly as I could. It was not that I thought my off-any-key voice would scare away whatever might have lurked in the shadows, but rather that my noise would make inaudible any approaching danger;

my version of sticking ones head in the sand to ward off danger. Besides, my singing announced that I was around, if anybody had been anywhere within reach of my voice. Whatever the illogic, my songs created an imaginary moving safety bubble that protected me as the last glow of the sun had faded and the night was the moon's.

After the last bend in the road, was I ever glad to see the lights of the houses and barns of Rütibühl in the near distance, and inhale the aroma of dairy cattle that creeps along the ground on still evenings. I had survived intact that scary quarter of an hour and reached my goal, "milk central".

Milk central, a large barn-like structure in the middle of the hamlet, was the daily focus of the dairy farmers for several miles around. It was surrounded by wooden or plastered farmhouses and their attached stables, weathered by decades, some possibly by more than a century, of snow, rain and sunshine. Flower boxes with red geraniums and mostly red and white petunias lined the window sills of these farmsteads during the summer; now, my first autumn in Switzerland, they were barren. The garden flowers that must have brightened the scene during the warm season were brown and bent, killed by the first frosts, but not yet chopped down. Even the hollyhock that guarded the manure piles ouside each one of the dairy barns were lonely sentinels, no longer green and in flower. Only the manure piles themselves retained their year-round stolid aromatic dignity. They varied in height and extent, depending on the size of the herd that supplied them, but each one was piled neatly, with vertical faces interwoven, as if braided. These were the resting piles, where the manure aged and the straw started to decompose so this organic fertilizer could readily be spread over the dormant pastures and incorporated into soil before a crop was seeded. The active piles looked a bit untidy because each day's production was still being added. A thick, wide wooden plank rested on one top edge of the stack and angled groundward. Farmhands, their feet in heavy boots, pushed wheelbarrows full of manure up that slope and then upended the barrow so the wet, ammonia-fragrant load would slide out. Then, when the day's waste had all been placed, a hired hand or the farmer poked a manure fork into the mounds and, fork by fork, distributed the fertilizer-to-be so the pile would be level and neat. Just because something stinks, doesn't mean it can't look neat.

Now, into brightly lighted milk central where the aroma of cow-warm milk, not steaming manure, suffused the air.

Milk central had three parts: the side where milk cans entered, the center where the milk was cooled and filtered and the side from where another set of filled cans was hauled to a processing dairy. I sometimes had to remind myself that I was there to get our milk, not just to stand there and watch the smoothly coordinated interplay of men, milk cans and milk.

One or two oxen hauled the farmers' wooden wagons loaded with anywhere from a couple to a dozen cans of milk from their stables to Rütibühl. Oxen were the common beast of burden because only prosperous farmers could afford horses and there were few of those around our neighborhood. Some hardscrabble farmers had to hitch a couple of cows to their milk wagon as they lacked other draft animals. Cows were the beast of burden of last resort, because whatever energy they used to pull a wagon was lost for generating milk, the most precious liquid in Switzerland, next to Kirsch fire water. The farmer, who had worked hard from early morning till now, did not ride on the wagon; he walked next to his draft cows, not to guide them, but to not waste their energy for his comfort.

A nudge or a "whoa!" and the the wagon stopped, lined up parallel to the entry door. The farmer or his hand removed the side boards and started handing down the cans full of milk, one by one, to one of the milk-can movers. These cans were plain, with tight-fitting lids, the kind that artists and amateurs now decorate with cutsie rural scenes and sell at high prices to people who like to give their suburban houses a fake rural touch. If they at least would show them off in their raw state, with the patina and dignity of work, their dents and scratches in plain view, just like wrinkles etched on faces by life and work.

The tare weight and the initials of the farmer were engraved on the sloping top of each can. Now, a helper weighed the cans and a clerk recorded, in ink, the date and gross and net weights in a permantently bound ledger book. Next, the clerk dipped a clean long-handled cylindrical stainless steel cup into the milk, stirred it with a swish to mix in the cream that had collected on top, withdrew a sample and then emptied it into a little numbered bottle. Eventually, someone somewhere measured the butterfat content of the milk in that sample, because the farmer's pay depended not only on the weight of milk he delivered, but also on its richness. It's the fat that ends up as butter or makes a full-bodied cheese a pleasure on bread or cracker. Besides, water is cheaper than milk and temptation had to be shortcircuited.

In the meantime, the farmer picked up a clean set of cans, loaded them on his wagon and took off for home. There was no need to wait and no pub in which to shoot the breeze and relax.

With the sample taken, a muscle man on the floor handed the can off to a muscle man standing on a platform next to the cylindrical milk cooler/strainer. Its outside was about three feet in diameter, four or five high, and made of horizontally corrugated stainless steel. The worker dumped the can and, in seconds, the milk hugged the corrugations in a layer thin enough to let the metal show through and then flowed into the trough that encircled the cylinder. Finally, the milk flowed out of a spout into a clean can. What was going on? How did the milk get to the outside of that cylinder? I stilled my curiosity for a while and asked only after the workers knew my face.

"Come on up here!" I climbed up to the platform. There, on top was not a big hole, but layers of perforated stainless steel screens, the coarsest one on top, the finest one on the bottom. The screens caught any particle that might have sneaked into the milk bucket, and then into the can, as the cow was milked - a length of straw, a stray hair from the milker's cap-covered head or from the cow's just-washed rump, anything large enough to be visible. The patient can handler explained that a little below the finest screen a solid plate was welded to the smooth inner surface of the cylinder to keep the milk from rushing down straight and to guide it to the undulating outside. Hidden between the inner smooth and outer corrugated cylinders was a space laced with pipes filled with cold running water. The whole contraption was an effective cooler; the milk started warm on top and had cooled by the time it was caught in the trough. There was no need for mechanicl refrigeration; at our elevation and latitude, ground water was cool, even in August. I thanked, climbed down, satisfied that the route of the milk no longer was a mystery to me.

After we exchanged a "*Guete Abend*" and "*Grüetzi*", one of the men dipped a long-handled ladle into a can of cooled milk, emptied two or three into each of my cans, until they were filled up to an engraved liter line. I thanked, but did not pay; the Voneschs took care of that once a month. Then, off toward home I marched, singing, because the same imagined dangers lurked homeward bound. Once Mauser came running, I was safe.

No, the milk was not pasteurized or homogenized; it just was cooled, delicious and satisfyingly rich.

Weighed down by the cans in the gray-black November evenings with the moonlight dampened by clouds or fog or when the moon was completely off duty, my fairy-tale trained imagination was busy conjuring up ghostly dangers lurking invisible in the darkness. When the ground was white and the dry snow squeeked under my boots, the bare, ranging branches of the trees along the road assumed whatever scary shape I imagined in the frigid light of the winter moon. Either way, I hurried as fast as I could toward the warmth of the Kachelofen, to outpace the unknown. What a relief when spring had nudged winter aside and sunset waited until the milk and I were safely home!

Winter in Rütibühl rode in on icy winds, but it also had its charms. One day or night, a few snow flakes drifted from the sullen sky, thawing as soon as they touched almost anything, the ground, my loden coat or Mauser's fur, as we came out of the house. Only when flakes landed on a piece of dark metal as cold as the air, could I see the jewelled delicacy of these ephemeral crystals. As for every kid who lives where snow marks winter, it was a refreshing relief from the weighty starkness of late fall. Everything of nature or left outside by man or woman, from fences that divided pastures, to wagons and the carpet beater, woven from flexible whips, and hanging from a hook near the laundry line, looked pristine, pure, white. No soot clung to the flakes; they landed clean and edible. A mouthful of overnight snow was a chilling thrill of clean water. A few inches, and a snowman quickly grew under Lucie's and my efforts; we threw snowballs at each other; Mauser wiggled her legs in the air as she slid about on her back, having fun, just like a kid. Lucie could target her parents and even her brother with snowballs, but not I. Snowballs were for kids, friends and family, not for strangers, no matter how kind. I would not have dared. I was not at home, the place where my parents lived.

Snow was fun, while it lasted; not the snow, but the fun. Winter's delight transformed itself into just plain work when the lacy crystals kept falling, piling up, day after day, day and night, until the countryside resembled a pie hidden under mounds of yet unbaked meringue. We had to be able to get out of the house, to work, to school, to feed the rabbits. The snow had to be shoved and shoveled out of the way.

In Mindelheim, snow had been pure entertainment - snow balls, sledding, skiing, building a snow man. I had no responsibility toward the snow. It had come; I had played in and with it, and in spring it had left, sometimes leaving a slushy mess that penetrated even the best boots. At home, I never had tired of snow. I had seen it being pushed aside, thrown up into windrows and piles by public workers; I was just a spectator. Here, on the lower reaches of Pfannenstiel, over 2000 feet above sea level and at the latitude of Newfoundland, I had to do white time. I had to help clear paths and walkways around the house and through the gravel apron in front of the garage. When the snow piled itself into high-alpine depths, I had to contend only with the trail to the rabbit hutches, because I could not heave a shovel full of snow five or six feet high onto the white wall that came to surround the parking apron. Just the Vonesch men reached these snowy heights

The communal snowplow did clear the road to the Kinderheim after busier routes had been made passable, especially those that led from farms to milk central in Rütibühl. After blizzards, when the earth hid under a fluffy stark-white cushion, the Vonesch men had to skip a day or two of work, because their motorcycles could not traverse the deep snow, even with a snow chain on the rear wheel, and there was no way we could have cleared the half mile to Rütibühl with muscle power.

Did it arrive in the the depth of winter or as it segued into spring when the warm Foehn wind raced down the north side of the Alps and brought with it a thick blanket of wet snow? It piled up and kept piling up on the ground and on top of the roof. Branches of trees snapped; the huge load on the roof worried Mr. Vonesch. Even its sturdily built frame might cave in under the tremendous winter weight. The danger would have escalated had the snow turned to rain, with the water trapped in the soggy white cover. I was excused from helping shove the snow off the roof; it would have been too hazardous for me. Had I slipped off that tile roof and broken a leg on quick descent, Aunt Jenny would not have been pleased. I just helped shove the snow to the side, bit by heavy bit, after it had landed on the ground.

Those kinds of winter days were a drag.

Meanwhile, in Mindelheim, my parents and grandmother worried about me. Cards and letters: How was I doing? What was I doing? Reassurance for me: We soon would be be together again. I told them how I was doing: Fine, as briefly as possible. I did not like to write, had little time to write and did not write well. There was blessedly little space on postcards, but my parents wanted to know more, more detail about my new home, about school. So, every now and then I persuaded myself to write a letter and fill both sides of the sheet to satisfy their curiosity. That they might be longing for me, their only child, never surfaced in my mind.

Homesickness did not snap at me; much as I loved my parents and my home in Mindelheim, that illness never disturbed my days or dreams. Might my equanimity have bothered my parents? My father reported to the Heilbronners, already in the United States:

> Werner writes in his most recent letter that he is very satisified and that it does not seem to him as if he had been away from home for a year already.
>
> (Letter, 31 October, 1940)

At this time, late in 1940, I had no idea that my parent's emigration seemed to be stalled and that those who had the least were anxious to help, but could not, and those who had the means remained silent. This is what my mother wrote, again to the Heilbronners:

> Lilli [her sister] again wrote and so movingly that it nearly brought tears to our eyes. She would give the shirt off her back. Those in Davenport [Iowa] could take her as an example of sisterly love even though Lilli and I were not always of one mind in our youth.
>
> (Letter, 29 November, 1940)

Aunt Lillian just recently had come to New York and was a household maid, with salary to match. In Davenport lived Margot, their half sister, married to the prosperous owner of a furniture store. She was the girl in the velvet dress when my mother was in a cheap, ugly outfit; she was the one unreasonably favored in the will of their father; she is the one who now, in 1940, ignores my mother's and my father's plight.

I wrote about my daily activities but nothing I figured might worry them, like hauling recycled food and drink out of a hole in the ground with a big ladle and sprinkling it around vegetables in the garden. Mostly, I filled the pages with news about school, what I was learning and the grades I earned. If I had not, I would have been asked anyway. My parents were sticklers about spelling and grammar. I saw many of my cards and letters twice, before I sent them and, again, after my father (usually) or mother had returned them with one of their letters, corrections entered in red or blue pencil. They were my first editors, unasked, unappreciated. I expected my teachers to correct my spelling and sentences; it was their job to prod and pester when my homework disappointed. My letters to home, to my parents, told news for those who missed me, who worried about me. I had sacrificed my time and brain to write, and they were not satisfied. These red and blue marks hurt my pride. then, many years later, annoyance turned into gratitude for my parents' persnicketiness. The corrections to and admonitions about my youthful efforts gradually awakened in me an appreciation of language well expressed and the conviction that words can be a source of endless satisfaction.

Good friends as we had been, neither Jakob nor Hanns ever wrote to me. As for me, I needed to save for my family my minimal inclination to write. Besides, I did not miss my friends. I was much too busy adjusting to my new environment, enmeshed in the challenges it posed and pleasures it provided.

Schwæbisch to Schwyzerdüetsch

Hochdeutsch, high German, was and is the language of exalted literature, commerce and schoolchildren in Germany. That is the language the teacher spoke, what we had to speak in school. But, among us boys in Mindelheim, in Schwabia, among the marginally educated adults and among those who did not want to be mistaken for uppity and stiff-lipped north Germans, Schwæbisch was the dialect, day and night. Schwæbisch is guttural, filled with abrasive *ch* sounds, replete with diminutive *-le* endings and almost impenetrable for those not born to it. I spoke it well, sometimes too well for my parents' middle class tastes.

In northern Switzerland, where German also is the mother tongue, Schwyzerdüetsch, a germanic dialect, reigns. Both variations of German share the harsh *ch* and favor diminutive endings, except that the Swiss use *-li* instead of *-le* and stretch the brief German *ü* sound by adding a mildy enunciated *e* to convert it to *-üe*. If anything, Schwyzerdüetsch is even denser to the outsider than Schwæbisch. It is a language that my ears and my tongue adopted within weeks and almost without effort by my conscious brain. It simply was a matter of getting acquainted with a new cousin who was around every waking hour.

Out among the meadows and woods, orchards and vinyards, where we lived, schools were the only islands where formal German surfaced. Even there, Swiss pride in its own idiomatic literature brought us stories, poems and songs by Swiss writers who described Swiss distinctiveness in their distinctive tongues. I use the plural, because even the German-speaking cantons of Switzerland, small as they are, range widely in dialect. We in the Canton of Zürich, and those in the other cantons relatively open to outside influences, hardly could understand the people from Appenzell, for example, and vice versa, who had developed their own vernacular in the isolation of mountain-ringed valleys.

My relatives, except Aunt Jenny, most of whom were well educated business people and professionals, spoke Schwyzerdüetsch in daily conversation. Lifelong patriotic pride was one reason. And, during World War II, no one I knew would have wanted to be mistaken for a German.

Four decades later, when Joan and I visited Switzerland, the first visit for her, an emotional return for me, my Schwyzerdüetsch had disappeared, buried under English, my new daily and welcome tongue. *Grüetzi!* the melded *Hi* and *Good bye* was all I had left. My Hochdeutsch, engraved at home and in schools, still functioned, but in no way did I want anyone to mistake me for a German. God forbid! Joan happened to have a little bejeweled Stars and Stripes flag in her purse. I asked that she pin it on the lapel of my jacket to avert potential geographic confusion when I spoke to waiters or store clerks. When I told my relatives why I wore the little symbol of America, flag waving of any kind not being my habit, they burst out laughing. "No way! With your American accent, no one ever would mistake you for a German." Relieved, I dropped the little flag back into Joan's purse.

Easily as I had made the transition to Schwyzerdüetsch, I was not fully satisfied until I could swear in dialect as well and with as much conviction and variation as my schoolmates. We started informal contests in that deep pool of imaginative verbiage on who could swear the longest without repeating himself, yes, himself; no girls allowed. Nice Swiss girls did not swear; nice Swiss boys did. I had pulled at least even in less than a year, with pride. Now, I was fully Swiss, completely ensconed in my new world.

Where have I led you, so far, in the tour through this, my new universe? I arrived at the Vonesch's Kinderheim Rütibühl, got to know the family, did more chores than I cared for and some for which I did not care at all, and ate foods I never had encountered at home. Now, on to school. Not that I was not enrolled in school within at most a few days after I arrived at the Kinderheim Rütibühl. In recalling this time of upheaval, my memories tumble like pebbles in a turbulent stream, rushing toward my fingers on the keyboard, wanting to be recorded first but stymied by the drag of sorting, by slow typing and the impossibility of distilling all my experiences and adventures at once. School was one of these adventures.

I started in the little school house of Wetzwil.

At *Heidi 's* school

The first day at school, my fifth one in five years, is not even a blur. After that day, the landscape and the school in it emerge like a mural before my eyes, some sections a bit overgrown by the mold of time but many as clear as yesterday.

Late in October of 1939, when I walked out of the house early in the morning and headed along my milk-boy path, backpack on my shoulders and arms swinging by my side, the trees were bare and the meadows browner than green. Mauser wagged her tail beside me until the first curve where I patted her head and ordered her home. Then, another turn or two and a gravel foot path branched off to the right and led down a gentle slope between fenced pastures. After winding along property lines for ten minutes or so, the path steepened and descended with hardly a bend, still hemmed in by pastures and meadows, then by leafless orchards, the dead grass beneath them dotted with rotting apples and pears. The skeltal expanse of trees was interrupted, on my right, by a vinyard where the last yellowish brown leaves still clung to the spidery arms of vines, ready to be scattered by the next storm.

Where the path dipped, I stopped for a few seconds. I could not hurry on without admiring the scene before me. At the bottom of the steep slope and a bit further on lay Wetzwil and my school. Beyond it, crowns of trees hid the near shore of Lake Zurich. From the far shore rose the dark northeren slope of the Uetliberg chain and in the haze of the distance I could see alpine peaks and ridges, the highest ones in winter's white. What a view! And, on an ordinary school day, on every ordinary day of school, when neither clouds, rain, or fog obscured the panorama. Did I ever feel lucky to live in this *Heidi* setting. Sure, it wasn't the real fictional Heidi's school; she lived in the Alps, far from me, where make-believe could roam unhindered, but the magic of beauty entranced even where I stood.

I wonder whether I ever wrote my parents and grandmother about my hike to school and the wonders it held. If I did, it would have brightened their day. If I did not, all I can do now is to apologize in my mind, to regret and go on. I saved none of their letters and cards from this time - we would be together again soon - messages in which they might have responded to my enthusiasm.

Down, and further down led the path, interrupted once in a while by a narrow horizontal terrace, all shaped by an ancient glacier during its retreat. Then, a minute or two of level ground and I was at school, not quite a half hour after I had left home.

Before we look at the school, I have to retrace my way, back up the hill and down again, on foot, by bike, in rain, in winter, and during the glorious spring and early summer.

Gravity was with me on the way to school; on the way home, I had to lift it up the hill. Downhill, I just had to keep my balance if some glacier-rounded pebbles on the gravel path suddenly rolled under my soles, speeding me forward. Uphill, they rolled my feet backward until I caught myself and scraped my shoes into solid dirt. Looking about me, I saw apples dot the brown grass-cushined ground to my left. I crossed a sward of this grass and picked up a tempting red-streaked apple. Caution told me to not quite trust a fruit lifted off the ground. I opened my pocket knife and halved the fruit: A wiggling worm and blackish-brown rot spoiled the white flesh. The same with a second and a third. Too bad; I had come too late in the season.

Later that first week, I climbed on my bike and headed for school down the gravel path. Big mistake. When I pushed the right pedal backward to engage the coaster brake, the rear wheel fish-tailed and threatened my balance. I managed to avoid a spill and landed at school without dirty pants or a scraped knee. After school, I had to grunt the bike up that same hill on foot, because it was way too steep for riding. After this one lesson in gravity and rolling pebbles, I flitted down on the paved road, nearly twice as far, but also twice as fast, the breeze in my face, leaning into the curves, swerving around a slow wagon. Such fun! Sure beat gravelling down the incline.

Perversely, a rainy, windy day was even more of a blast. My mother had packed my blue rubberized rain cape, a tent down to my knees, with slits for my arms and a hood to keep my head dry. When the wind pushed on my back, I spread my arms as widely as I could while still holding on to the handle bars and, presto, the cape became a sail and I moved at the speed of the wind, even on the flat, with hardly any effort. Then too, I sang to myself, not because of fear of what might lurk behind bare trees, but because I had to give voice to the thrill of the ride.

Heading home was work. I rode uphill where I could muster the strength and pushed the bike when my legs refused to crank any harder. Every now and then, I caught up with a farm wagon slowpoking along in my direction. I liked wagons stacked with hay the best. I could grab a post that held in the side board, the one opposite of where the farmer was walking, next to his draft oxen or horse; there, to his right, the mound of hay shielded me from his backward glance. Too bad that some of these farmers had a finely tuned sense of regular progress. Even my 100 pounds or so, including books and bike, slowed some of the animals just enough, even if only momentarily, that their master suspected a freeloader. A yell, and I let go. No farmer was about to have his oxen or horse eat extra hay so I could save my energy. But, just because I sometimes was caught, was no reason to give up trying.

The snows of early November thawed quickly on the gravel path and on the road of our south-facing slope. The summer warmth stored in the earth and the sun of late fall kept path and road passable even after just the tips of grass blades peeked through the autumnal coverlet of snow on the meadows. Once winter had settled over the country, my bike was useless; I relegated it to a corner of the garage and activated my mother's skis, now mine.

My father had always waxed my skis before; I knew nothing of this art. Mr. Vonesch had two kinds of wax, one for powdery and one for soggy snow. He showed me how to apply it, smoothly and not too much. We even used an old iron, retired from flattening clothes, and warmed just enough on the stove to soften and spread the wax evenly.

With slick-waxed skis on my boots, I glided cross-country where no fences, orchards or vinyards interfered until I reached the gravel path, now a white lane. Instead of whipping down the already trodden path, I wanted the feel of fresh untrampled powder snow under my skis. Between trail and vinyards and trail and fenced pastures was an invitingly wide virgin strip of white. I pushed off, hunkered low to gain speed and had a blast, until just before the ground levelled off. There, a little hump surprised me and sent me flying. After I mentally inspected my legs and arms, and confirmed that only my pride and self confidence were damaged, I loosened the bindings, struggled to my feet in the deep snow and brushed the powder off my face and clothes. My books, had they scattered? Had they been wet by snow? No. Relief. They were safe in the backpack. The books belonged to the school, to all the people, not to me; keeping them in prime condition was an almost sacred duty. If they were messed up, from whatever cause, someone would have had to pay, Aunt Jenny in my case since I had no money. She would not have been pleased.

The homeward trek was slow. If the snow was well trampled, I carried the skis up the steep incline before I strapped them on again. If my boots sank in, I moseyed uphill on my skis, pushing the right pole down and the right ski forward, angled to the right, then the left one down and the left one forward, angled to the left, one after another, again and again, until the trail levelled off, leaving behind me a neat herringbone pattern where the edges of the skis had cut into the snow.

Skis were useless during the slush season. Downhill, I could scoot my hob-nailed boots forward on the icy slush; after school I had to shove them into the mix of watery snow and gravel, step by step, up to level ground. By then, I hardly could wait for the warm Italian breezes to rid the landscape of the last mucky remnant of winter. Spring days might be, and often were, rainy, but I could ride my bike, or walk without slipping or straining.

The interlude between matted brown meadows punctuated by patches of now dirty, watery snow in hollows and the greening of the countryside was shorter on our south-facing slope than across Lake Zurich where white still dominated the scene. Gradually, new blades of grass outgrew last year's blanket of brown leftovers and bright green patches of clover spread near the ground. Occasionally, I spied and plucked a four-leaf branchlet to press and dry between sheets of newspaper. Once crisp, I tucked the leaflets between pages of a book I happened to be reading for pleasure as Aunt Erna, who had a knack for finding four-leafers, had done at home. She usually found more than the rest of the family put together when we strolled along a meadow out in the country near Mindelheim. She took pleasure in her finds, but I never was sure whether or not she really believed that they were an omen of good luck.

All narrow leaves looked like grass to me until some stretched out beyond the blades and turned out not be blades but stems tipped with tiny flower clusters. In another week or two, depending on the contest between the lingering cold of late winter and the benign spring sun, a flower would open here and there. Then, day by day, more flowers unfolded their petals until the meadows along my way to school dazzled with spring-time glamour. Red, white, blue, purple; large, small; tall, short; monochrome and dark centers surrounded by brightly-pigmented crowns. What a show! They were nameless wonders that I gradually learned to identify by name, now forgotten, after I had plucked a big bouquet on my way home where an appreciative Mrs. Vonesch introduced me to each kind of blossom.

If the unsentimental Mrs. Vonesch liked the flowers, my teacher might too. Just like Little Red Ridinghood, I strayed from the path and in a few minutes I carried a showy bouquet in my hands. But, instead of a wolf in grandma's bed, it was the pretty Fræulein Wirz who greeted me at school. Her smiling "*Viele Dank, die sind ja herrlich!*"- Many thanks, they are gorgeous! warmed my mood the rest of the morning.

I did learn that first spring that Swiss farmers protect their pastures like a bear her cubs. As I wandered through a flowery slope on the way home, enjoying the beauty and gathering a bouquet, a commanding voice suddenly ordered me to get out and stay out, to not trample down the plants. I retreated in the face of a crabby farmer who somehow had materialized as I was absorbed. He let me keep the flowers; the damage had been done. I must have looked surprised. With all these flowers spread in every direction, what's a few more ar less? I asked myself. The man must have read my thought: I was not to pad into his meadow again, because the weight of the boots on my feet, with me on top, squashed down the plants would keep them flat on the ground, their stems and blades broken. Then, when he later would mow the pasture with his scythe, the cutting edge would miss the plants I had trampled and so would be wasted. I sputtered "*Ja, ja, i versteh*".- Yes, yes, I understand, retreated and, from then on, confined my flower picking to no farther than I could reach from the barren edge of the path with maybe half of my sole edging into the grass.

While I savored the peaceful pastoral scenery in May of 1940, flower-carpeted meadows, cows feeding in lush pastures, white apple blossoms backed by blue sky, a mild southern breeze brushing against my face, German Stucka bombers and flying machine guns terrorized French civilians as they fled their burned-out villages and towns, left in shambles by the merciless invaders. Belgium overrun, and Holland, too. Would we remain a quiet island while the Nazi hordes ravaged Germany's western neighbors and threatened England? This was the question at the dinner table and at breakfast as we listened on the radio to report after agitating report of conquering Germans and devastated victims. My silent questions were: What should, would I do if the Germans invaded Switzerland? Would there be a place to hide? Could I hide in the woods of the Pfannenstiel? It seemed silly to even think that I could survive up there, by myself. What about my mother, father, and grandmother, what would happen now? Would they still be able to come, to pick me up on the way to America?

Nothing but answerless questions.

These questions, this uncertainty, this potential threat faded from my conscious as I headed for school each morning, surrounded by springtime grandeur.

A cornucopia of fruit ripened in late summer and fall along the gravel path and the paved road. Prune plums, sweet as candy; aromatic leather apples, their homely, tan leathery skin protecting white, intensely perfumed flesh; pears dripping with juice and flavor, all just begged to be appreciated during this, my first harvest season in Switzerland. I, oblivious to the world beyond my view, retrieved fruit from the ground, avoiding those with suspicious-looking dark spots, just in case a worm had arrived before I did.

Homeward bound, I took no more fruit than I reasonably could eat that day. On the way to school, I ate none, but stuffed my pockets to bulge. Then, at school, my prizes made good trading chips for cookies or other treats. Of all the times I stopped to steal, a farmer only once yelled me out of his orchard and that was when he saw me yank plums from a tree. I quickly retreated, promising I would not do it again and keeping my promise, in his orchard.

During the season of ripe fruit my digestive system kept busy, but it became panicky only once. A vinyard with beautiful, tempting purple grapes lined a stretch of the gravel path to the left on my way home. I just had to have some of those grapes. I plucked a bunch of berries. They were a bit sour, as Swiss grapes tend to be, but not so tongue curling that I wanted to spit them out. I was loath to linger; I did not want to get caught thieving, so I paid little attention to details. An hour or two after I was home, my insides started to feel twisted and both ends kept busy the rest of the day. That is how I learned that mixing stolen fruit with ignorance can be sickening. The grapes had been sprayed with Bordeaux mixture, a common copper-based fungicide of which I had never heard until Mrs. Vonesch warned me to never eat grapes without washing them first. Whether it was the spray or too many sour grapes, I neither knew nor cared; I never again stole grapes.

So many things to see, to take; entertainment all around, just for me, provided by nature and diligent farmers.

My mind switched from amusement to school once I saw its roof and a bit to the right and behind it, the steeple of the Protestant church. Education and religion, both important, rigorous and strict, side by side, but separate. In Swiss public schools, learning ruled, not indoctrination.

Trees still were wintery bare and traces of snow clung to clumps of grass in my snapshot of a three and a half-story stuccoed building, the school of Wetzwil. A large dormer window faces southward on the partial fourth floor and the top of a slim chimney protrudes on the far side. On the western half of the ground floor two doors face south. Between them, anchored to the wall, stands a water fountain with a large baptismal-type font from which rises a narrower decorative rectangular column. From its center, a plain pipe splashes water in to the basin below.

More than a half century later, when my hair was mostly gray and thinning, we passed by in a car. The scene looked almost the same, except it was on a sunny, slightly muggy June afternoon. Had I been the driver and at leisure, I would have stopped and poked around, but time was short that day. I wish I could have looked inside, to conjure up the past.

When my youthful head was covered with a shock of curly black hair, I turned right at the bottom of the hill, walked a hundred feet or so and was at the foot of the stairs that led to our class room. Singular. All thirty of us, plus or minus a few, from the first through the fifth grade, learned in this one room. We had the school to ourselves, boys and girls together, not like in Germany, where we boys walked to our school and the girls, separate and unknown to us, to theirs, at the other end of town.

We sat on wood one-piece desk-benches, each one made for two students, arrayed in rows, one or two per grade. The first graders sat the furthest from the door and we oldest ones nearest it. The slanted, hinged desk top was our table and it covered the hollow where we kept pens, pencils, erasers, paper, books and whatever else would fit in - rubber bands, safety pins, fruit I had aquired on the way to school. Those slanted tops were heavy and easily slipped out of small hands. Suddenly crash! All eyes turned to the culprit who, red-faced, eyes cast down, quickly returned to his or her scribbling.

Like in thousands of other class rooms, a blackboard covered most of the wall in front and the teacher's wooden desk and a straight-back chair faced us. Unlike in thousands of class-rooms near mid-century, a pot-bellied stove dominated the right hand corner. It was our only source of warmth during the long winter. Switzerland was and is bereft of oil, gas and coal; the only native fuels were wood and falling water for hydroelectric power. Whatever our quaint heater burned, wood or coal, was in short supply because the war had decimated imports of fuels.

Many days during the winter, especially the one of 1940-41, we sat at our desks in caps, scarves, coats and mittens, wiggling our wool-socked toes in our boots to keep them warm. We did have to pull off our mittens to write. But, nobody complained. We were being patriotic. "Just think how cold the soldiers are out there in snow and wind along the border, protecting our country from the Boches." Even our teacher used that French epithet for the Germans. Every 15 minutes or so we all stood up, shook our arms, stomped up and down on the wood-plank floor in unison with our teacher and then sat down again to listen, to write, to figure, to learn.

The frigid weather and scarcity of fuel brought us school kids a bonus, a week or two of vacation from school in the depth of winter, but not from homework. Out teacher piled it on, some for every missed day of school, so we would not lag too much in our learning.

Our youthful patriotism wasn't just wrapped in a winter coat. We also celebrated it in summer, with our bare feet. None of us kids wore shoes to school. Here, Swiss thrift and patriotism marched hand in hand. Why waste shoe leather when skin can toughen and renew itself? Besides, leather was needed for soldiers' boots. I loved it, sliding my feet through the morning dew and spreading my toes wide after their months long confinement in leather. No shards of glass, no nails, no junk endangered our feet. There was no litter. The most we had to watch out for were horse apples on the roads, cow pads through the pastures, bees in patches of white or purple clover blooms. Walking barefoot epitomized all the gifts of summer, school or no.

One Monday morning, as we younsters arrived at school, Freulein Wirz, in her mid-twenties, neither tall nor short, slim, with wavy light brown hair pulled back into a loose bun, greeted us in the doorway. Her predecessor, a man who left no trace of memory, had been called into the army. Enthusiasm radiated fom her bright smile that embraced us all. She taught us every subject, spelling, orthography, grammar, reading, arithmetic, history and many songs, none of which I remember.

There was no school day when we did not sing. Singing is a passion with the Swiss, may be an outlet for emotions that the Swiss otherwise tend to keep retracted. We learned kid's songs - there were first graders in our room - patriotic songs, songs about nature, about the beauty of Switzerland, songs in high German and in Schwyzerdüetsch. Ms. Wirz led us with her clear soprano voice, waving her hands in time so we, the bunch of us, would hit the same note and syllable at about the same time.

Having a loud voice and no musical ear whatever, she gave me that slightly jaundiced look of someone whose ears are being assaulted by painfully false notes. "*Werner, nicht so laut, bitte.*"- Werner, please, not so loud. Ms. Wirz appreciated my enthusiasm but wanted to dampen my sound so it would not drown out those whose voices sang in tune. My volume had a hard time fitting into a class room; after all, I had trained myself to sing full bore to the ghostly trees and unknown hazards of darkness as I hurried to fetch milk in Rütibühl.

Miss Wirz did not have an easy task. She had to keep kids in four grades busy on their own while trying to stuff learning into those of the fifth. She would stop in mid-sentence to remind straying eyes and ears to pay attention to their own work, not to what she was saying to only a row or two of us.

This loose arrangement left ample wiggle room for some of us, mostly boys, to cut up behind Miss Wirz' back. We passed notes with funny faces on them, contorted our faces so the younger kids would laugh, stuck our tongues out and whatever other tricks kids the world over play behind teachers' backs. We older ones set the pace; we had more experience with teachers, what one might get away with and what was absolutely off limits, such as shooting folded and re-folded paper missiles with rubber bands.

Miss Wirz was a wonderful teacher; she was totally dedicated to us, her charges, her children. But, she had a self-destructive flaw for a teacher: She could not enforce discipline. When she faced west, someone to the east would cut up; when she faced east, someone in a row to the west would misbehave, like a game of ping pong, Miss Wirz on one side and a half dozen of us on the other. She was too kind to use the perfectly permissible Swiss pedagogy, a whack on the fingers with a ruler or even on the rear with a hefty yardstick.

We kept it up, until one day she broke - tears burst from Freulein Wirz' eyes, she ran outside, slammed the door and left us alone; us, about two dozen school kids. She was the only teacher in Wetzwil, not another one around to help her sit on us; no principal to help. It just was she and us. She had snapped; we had won.

We were stunned into silence. We had driven our teacher out of school. What now? We just sat and did whatever work we were supposed to be doing. Time passed. Finally, whispers. Will she be back? If not, what then? Where did she go? No one dared to look out the windows to check. Time passed. Five minutes, ten, maybe fifteen. However long, it seemed forever. Finally, the door opened and she was back, red-eyed, but composed. We stood at attention as we did every day at the start of the school day, just straighter. She said nothing, nothing at all about our brazen misbehavior, she just continued where she had left off.

Our collective shame shadowed our faces, but none of us knew what to say. We had never experienced anything like it. We were used to male teachers, disciplinarians, regardless of how nice they were. We never would have dared to behave so rottenly with a man in front of the class. Without a word of reprimand from Miss Wirz, we felt chastened and were just glad she had come back. From that day on we kids had as much of a love affair as one could have with a teacher. She taught. We learned.

I must have learned faster and better than most of the other fifth graders, behaved well most of the time, smiled nicely, eagerly raised my hand if I knew the answer. At least I assume so, because she took a special interest in me; she challenged me with extra work; she even responded to my parents to explain the grading system in Swiss schools when they wrote to her wondering why my marks were under their expectations. Miss Wirz looked at me as her star student. She encouraged, corrected, showered attention upon me. I was special. It was what I have must have craved, attention as a child. With my parents across an impenetrable frontier, I was lucky that she had landed at our country school and I in her heart.

....

> Thanks God, Werner writes that he is doing fine. ... His teacher [Miss Wirz] wrote a charming letter about him and we were totally surprised by its contents, especially her description of his disposition and we very much hope that he will make his way.
>
> (Letter to the Heilbronners, 29 November, 1940)

....

Miss Wirz' fame even reached Uncle Max and Aunt Berta Bach in Munich:

> We also know that your teacher has taken you in her heart and that you are her darling.
>
> (20 September, 1941)

Even after I had outgrown Miss Wirz' one-room schoolhouse, we wrote to each other, I telling her about my progress in school and other activities, she commenting on them and pointing out any spelling or grammatical errors that might have crept into my missives, just like my parents had done. The correspondence finally withered a while after she had married, but she still lives in my little blue address book: M. Rutishauser-Wirz, Rautistrasse 107, Zurich 48. I must have written to her even after I already had come to America, because Mrs., not Frau, precedes her initial.

Free public education was much more than a laudable concept in Swiss schools, it was a fact. It was free, period. We had to buy nothing, not pencil, not paper, not books. The school, the public, supplied all of them. But, we were responsible for them, were we ever. "Don't grind the pencil down in the sharpener!" "Write on every line, don't waste paper." "Don't tear the pages in the books, turn them carefully!" On and on, until it stuck and we automatically were careful with the people's property. When our workbooks were full, we had to take them home to be signed on the last page by our parents, by Mrs. or Mr. Vonesch for me. A new one was ours only after that signature came to school; no escaping parental scrutiny and no excuse for parental ignorance of their kids' progress, or lack of it.

None of us had to pay for the little bottle of milk, about a half pint, that was handed out about mid-morning. Even I, a foreigner, received everything free in Wetzwil.

Free and exiting was the event across the road. We did not see the pig being killed one fall day at the farm across from our school. We heard its last last squeal, but could not budge from our seats to check it out. When we finally were set loose for recess and raced outside, we spotted the action and a half dozen of us had to see just what was going on. As we nosed closer, half-circling the scene next to the barn, the farmer collected the last gush of pig blood in a large cauldron and his wife was stirring it with a big wooden paddle. She kept stirring, steadily and slowly, until the blood had coagulated so she then could make blood sausage. I ignored the dead, bloody pig, stretched on a wooden platform, the best I could, but I sure would have liked to have some of that sausage after it was seasoned and cooked. I knew it well from home, big, thick slices of uniquely-flavored dark red meat free of grizzle. We, my family, had enjoyed this delicacy, just boiled, served with boiled potatoes and cabbage, a vegetable forceful enough to compete with this rustic sausage.

Miss Wirtz had to yell at least twice to separate us from this compelling, gory scene to get us back to book learning.

Although I like cities and their fascinations, there just for the watching, I am glad I was wrapped up in small-town and rural life when I was a boy. Spending all ones life in just one setting makes only a partial circle, an incomplete slice of life, other slices perceived only dimly, if at all.

Dull boy, mysterious girl

I had just two friends, one a boy, one a girl.

The boy, I'll call him Silvio, lived with his parents in a modest, messy house about a quarter mile down the hill, beyond the meadow nearest our domain. He was my buddy simply because he lived closer to us than anyone else. He was much huskier than I was and taller, too, which reassured me when we trailed through the woods nearby looking for adventure. We never ran into any memorable incidents, but looking for them was enough thrill, at least for me. I was used to exploring a small city, but automatically avoiding nettles or the sting on the cheek of a ricochetting branch as we trailed among the trees required practice in field and forest.

When I looked at Silvio's father, a big hulk of a man with short unruly hair, flushed cheeks, arms like logs and the manners of a ditchdigger, which he was, I realized that Silvio was a smaller edition of his father and that we had too little in common, other than field and forest, to be friends for long. The fact the Voneschs automatically looked down upon the these neighbors, they being Italian immigrants, also wedged between us. Many German-speaking Swiss considered Italians to be at least two notches below their level, uneducated, noisy, not neat, hands flailing when they talked, relaxed about work, all major sins north of the Alps. That Silvio's parents fit some of these prejudices proved to us that they were well founded.

That left me one friend, a girl in fairy-tale bower.

No, she was not Snow White, but pretty just the same, slightly built, with curly light brown hair, and a grade younger than I was. Like that of other girls who crossed my young years, her first name was erased by time. Gretel fits her well.

Gretel lived in a wooden cottage set back from the paved road between school and home. If the cottage had been in a forest, I would have expected Hænsel to answer the door of vertical planks with a large key hole on the right, just below the sturdy handle. The door had weathered to a warm, variably dark grayish brown, like the rest of the outside, although the wall was nearly hidden under a rank vine that had climbed up to a wide overhang and sprang into a pink cascade of flowers when spring gave way to summer. The blooms in carefully tended beds of wild flowers around the house reached almost to the bottom sills of the windows. It was an enchanting apparition. This is where Gretel introduced me to her mother.

Her mother, an older image of her little daughter, with curly light brown hair encircling a graciously smiling face, touched by a shade of elegance, was another mother who knew how to bake enticing cookies that she set before us two children at the table in the dining nook. The darkish wood of the walls lent the interior a mysterious fairy tale aspect when the cheery-flowered white curtains with curly edges filtered the sun into a setting of sturdy, simple furniture.

I never could stay much longer than the time I took to eat a cookie or two and have a glass of milk. Chores and homework were waiting up on the hill. Gretel's mother asked me questions about who I was, where I came from, the kind of questions adults ask kids, but that kids can't ask adults. I never saw Gretel's father.

If I could have asked and been told the truth, I would have been incredulous, as I was after I had moved on, when I learned who the cute Gretel and her charming mother were. Gretel was the daughter of none other than Otto Strasser and her mother was his wife. The father was the brother of Gregor Strasser, one of the founders of the Nazi movement in Germany, and himself an enthusiastic Nazi and editor of a Nazi newspaper Gregor had founded. According to William Shirer in his *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich,* Otto had "fallen by the wayside" by 1930, when Hitler kicked him out of the Nazi party because he had taken seriously the "socialist" and "workers" in the offical name of the party. Wherever he was, he was not in Wetzwil, but his little girl and his wife were there, living a quiet life in a little cottage virtually hidden from the world. And I, a Jewish refugee boy from Nazi Germany, was greeted and treated like a welcome guest at that cottage. Strange.

According to Aunt Martha Bollag of the surprise visit in Mindelheim, who had moved to Herrliberg after she had become widowed, the Strasser duo lived in Wetzwil until about 1950. Where they moved she did not know.

My Swiss Relatives and I

You now know the Voneschs, my *de facto* hosts, are acquainted with the novel environment in which I was parked by the Schweizer Kinderhilfe, in concert with my relatives, and followed me as I walked, biked and skied to my one-room school in Wetzwil and stepped inside. Now, I open the book of relatives, a volume that wrote itself during my Swiss years. Embedded in my memory are individuals and families, circumstances and experiences, some delightful, others infuriating. I had to accept them as they were, mostly graciously and gratefully, others grudgingly, even quietly resentful.

By blood, I should have introduced the clan before the strangers, but it was the unrelated Voneschs who made my home and daily life, the ones who were close day in day out, whom I observed, from whom I learned, whose habits and attitudes helped shape mine during my two and a half years under their tutelage.

I only slowly realized that I am remembering individuals most of whom are dead, some my contemporaries, some younger, some gone half a century and more. I became conscious of this void only after remembrance had piled on remembrance. How come I caught on so slowly? I suppose I did not ponder the distance in time because my subjects still live in my mind; I can see them; I can hear them. I interact with them as I resurrect them, likely not as perfect images of who they were, but filtered and shadowed, possibly even altered, by the flight of years.

Chronology is a straight line; my memory is not, except for a few fixed markers. Any loops and reversals are immaterial as I try to convey over six years' worth of impressions of and adventures with the Swiss branches of my family. I will sketch the portraits one by one. Some will be more flattering than others. The impact of some left more marks on my inner landscape than that of others, but all cared for me on some level and mostly tried to ease my life without parents. Direct descendants of some of these relatives and of the unrelated strangers still live. I hope they take satisfaction in the many kindnesses showered on me by their kin and will forgive the resurrection of unedifying episodes and attitudes. May they understand that once I decided to tell my story, I had to relate it as I saw it, as I experienced it, as I remember it, without conscious varnish or exaggeration.

I will start with my relatives in Zurich, those physicaly clostest to me

The formidable Aunt Jenny

'Aunt' Jenny Gundelfinger, generous, tight, aloof, concerned with my welfare, reigned at 22 Mythenquai. She was an aunt of my mother's by marriage. In her mid-sixties when she paved my way to Switzerland, she seemed ancient to my eleven-year-old eyes when her maid, who had answered the door bell, guided Uncle Victor Bollag and me into her presence in the sitting room of her domain.

Aunt Jenny was taller than my mother or I at eleven, but still short, and looked dowagerly. Her smile seemed reluctant, with a skeptical tinge, but not unkind. Her gray hair was loosely folded around her head, not a coiffure that required a beauty shop appointment. Her greeting was graciously cool, born of genteel upbringing and successfully restrained emotion. She accepted kisses of greeting or thanks, given reluctantly by me, as I did not like to kiss old people, but seemed to prefer a mild handshake. She had relatively large teeth with the narrow curve of the uppers protruding sufficiently over the lower set to have called for orthodontics in more modern times.

As I stepped through the door of her apartment that first time, a pair of large, elaborately decorated oriental vases, Chinese I supose, that served as umbrella stands caught my eyes. I had never seen anything like them; their filigreed richness spoke of good taste and money. Later, on a rainy day, after a mild reprimand, I learned to gently set my umbrella into one of the vases, letting the metal point touch, rather than clang against the bottom.

I remember little else about Aunt Jenny's furnishings, except that they conveyed luxury heretofore unknown to me. All seats were soft and no trace of the residue that gradually accumulates under the touch of even clean human hands marred the armrests of upholstered chairs or couch.

Soft also was the shiny brass bed in which I slept on the few occasions when Aunt Jenny invited me to stay overnight. The bed preened with flimflammery, including two or three fancily fringed white pillows that served no purpose other than to show themselves along the head frame whose curlicues now remind me of a French horn, inflated by grandeur. An equally white beadspread fringed with golden embroidery covered the useful parts of the bed. What would I do with all that stuff when I wanted to go to bed? Where would I pile it, on the spotless floor or on the arm chair? If I put it on the chair, where would I put my clothes? Certainly not piled on the floor. Clothes are to be neatly arranged and put on a chair; that is what my mother had taught me. As it turned out, my concerns were unfounded. By bed time, the maid had made the frivolities disappear and the bed stood there to receive me.

And receive me it did. I pulled back the feather bed covered in white damask and hopped into bed, as I usually did, except the mattress didn't push back; it kept going, down and down. All that luxury enveloped me, nearly smothered me, or so it seemed. How would I ever get out of there in the morning? I couldn't sprawl in my usual way, but had to conform to the maternal pouch that was the mattress. To my surprise, I slept soundly in this lap of luxury. In the morning, I grabbed the brass rail that framed the bed so I could pull myself up over its edge fast enough to safely reach the bathroom.

Luxury pervaded Aunt Jenny's guest room, not the cuisine. I would have preferred the reverse. She had lived in England and English cooking emerged from her kitchen. I am sure her maid, like almost any Swiss maid, frequently Italian by birth, could have conjured up flavorful dishes, but no, she had to cook as Aunt Jenny decreed: boiled beef, boiled potatoes with a bit of butter, boiled carrots, after a mildly interesting chicken broth. The beef was tender, the potatoes and carrots cooked just right; nothing bad, just plain and never quite as much as I easily could have held. To have two helpings was OK, but just OK, and their size was modest by my rural standards. Aunt Jenny simply was not used to having a growing boy at her table.

Either we had no desserts, which is possible, or they were such that they lost significance as soon as I had swallowed them.

What a puzzle, that someone who lived in great comfort would eat so simply, so unimaginatively. I was used to hearty dishes at home and at the Kinderheim. We may have eaten cow's udder and meat off soup bones, but they were dishes I enjoyed, ample and satisfying. They were infused with personality.

The luxury I did appreciate at Aunt Jenny's was outside the windows of her fourth-floor apartment in a large, U-shaped, gray edifice. Beds of red flowers bordered by a green hedge hugged the foundation and broke the gray monotony at street level. The luxury for the eyes lay beyond, where a verdant park bordered, and still borders, the south shore of Lake Zurich. Tall evergreens, short evergreens, huge bare crowns on an autumn day, their trunks hidden by shrubbery and beds of asters, all carefully designed for pedestrians who strolled on meandering paths through swards of lawn and urban forest. Through the trees, I glimpsed the sparkling surface of the lake and, beyond, the hills on the north shore. What a lovely place. I always savored winding through this landscape on my way from the streetcar stop or the railroad station to Aunt Jenny's apartment and back again. From the path along the shore, I could see sailboats gliding over the water, couples sitting close together in row boats and, in the distance, the white ferries and steamers that carried commuters and sightseers across and the length of the lake. These walks were my appetizer and dessert.

Aunt Jenny occasionally asked me to accompany her on a stroll through this relaxing scene. She put on a hat, black or dark blue - she likely would have felt naked without one - and then we moseyed out of the apartment to the elevator, zipped down to the street level, walked across the Mythenquai and finally strolled along for a half hour or so, arm in arm, by her choice. I had to engage much of my mind to keep me walking slowly during these strolls. This restraint on my natural pace was a mental and physical effort, really tiring. I hope I was able to hide my impatience with the slow pace and, by implication, with her. After all, I owed her much more than the support of my arm for an occasional half hour in the park.

....

> Dear Aunt Jenny!
>
> Your most recent telegram has given us renewed courage and new confidence that our plans will be realized. I find it almost impossible to express my thanks in words and you can be assured that we will never forget, as long as we live, the good you have done for us three. (My) profoundest thanks for it. I hope that some day the time will come when we can prove to you that these are sincere sentiments and I hope that the Almighty will protect you from all misfortune.
>
> (My father, in a letter, 9 April, 1941)

....

The Adler quartet

The Adlers, Aunt Edith, Aunt Jenny's older daughter, Uncle Josef, and their sons Erich and Georg, George after his emigration to the United States, ranked above any other of my relatives in Switzerland. They were generous and fun to be with. Where they lived reflected their spirit as much as their means.

On my way to their earie, I hiked from the flats near the lake, up Ræmistrasse, then past the University of Zurich and the Federal Technical University, two of the worlds premier institutions of higher learning, then somewhere right and left, up and up the Zürchberg to Im Schilf 7.

The stuccoed off-white apartment building was a plain, modern block with large windows. The Adlers lived on the top, the third floor. Once the maid had opened the door and welcomed me, I stepped into the generous foyer, similar to the one we had in Mindelheim, only this one more richly appointed. A large oriental rug occupied the center, a little table stood in front of a well-framed mirror and two chairs, delicately upholstered and attractively shaped, not quite invited anyone to sit on them. The kitchen, bathroom and the bedrooms, including one for guests, completed the U around the foyer.

The lavatory facilities were as spotless as the kitchen. The porcelain toilet, in a separate little room, was strictly modern. The bathroom housed the usual amenities, a tub and two sinks, a large mirror, plus a puzzle. It was not sink, not tub, nor toilet. It was too low to be the first, too short for the second, but resembled the last. But why would anyone need two toilets, one in its own cubicle and one right next to the tub? I was mystified but did not ask for enlightenment. Then, once when I spent a night at the Adlers, I found this little basin handy for washing my feet. Maybe that was its purpose, to conveniently wash ones feet. This time I asked. Uncle Josef, Aunt Edith and Georg - Erich was absent - blushed bright red and looked as if they were about to burst with laughter, but they held their merriment. I could not figure out what was so funny about my question, but was satisfied that they did not mind my sweaty feet in their bidet. It was years before I learned the mystery's name and more years its function. The innocent from the country, that was I.

Every visit to the Adlers I looked forward to turning left; there, at the end of the foyer, a shiny black grand piano, played occasionally and expertly by Uncle Josef, dominated a large well-furnished living room, bathed in light, and where, below my eyes, spread the city with its church and cathedral spires, Lake Zurich, the Uetliberg and, above and beyond, the white garland of the Alps. It was a panorama no less memorable than the one that entranced me at home in Rütibühl.

The large window of the dining room, another eye over city and country , did not divert my attention from the center of the table once the maid had set down the bowls and platters of dishes emanating tempting aromas. Much as I always enjoyed the food, the specifics have escaped my mind, with one exception. It was a time of war and deprivation in most of Europe, and here, in front of me, the table carried a bowl of bright red raspberries. They looked gorgeous, just as if they had been freshly picked. Aunt Edith served each one of us a little hump of berries and topped it with a dab of whipped cream. Talk about gustatory heaven! I never had heard of, much less had seen or tasted any kind of frozen food. I marvelled at this delicious surprise. Fresh-tasting raspberries in early spring! A Possover treat. Even the Adlers seemed taken by this luxurious novelty, so much so that the mostly blue wrapper was passed from hand to hand around the table, for us to admire. On it, the most prominent word spelled "Birdseye", the name that would become synonymous with frozen food.

Aunt Edith resembled Aunt Jenny, her mother, in appearance and stature, but was lively, even excitable, and she did not restrain her smiles. She was genteel, in accordance with her upbringing, without taking herself as seriously as her mother did. Uncle Josef's hilarious, occasionally off-color jokes would elicit a grin, with just an obligatory hint of disapproval; her mother undoubtedly would have frozen the air before the last syllable had reached freedom. Like her mother, Aunt Edith was mostly thumbs when it came to daily tasks that others do automatically. Both were reared where and when the exercise of practical skills was not considered lady-like. A lady had to know what needed to be done, not how to do it. For that she had a maid. Between them, Aunt Edith and the maid ran a household where comfort and neatness were taken for granted and where the kitchen was not enslaved by parsimonious English fare.

Aunt Edith was the only one of the Adlers who visited us, twice, after she had been widowed. She was as gracious a guest as she had been a hostess, although our accommodations were much more modest than hers in Zurich. A visit to Yosemite Valley seemed like the thrill of her life, as it was for us the first time we emerged from the tunnel at Inspiration Point to be overwhelmed by the magnificence of the valley below and the sheer rock faces that rise from the meadows. A bittersweet memory. Aunt Edith died less than a year later, in 1966. At least, we were able to repay her a little bit of the kindness she had shown me, the distantly related refugee boy.

Uncle Josef was witty, good-humored and generous. His sense of humor reminded me of Uncle Alfred's, always a clever phrase ready to pop out when suitably provoked. Even in a portrait where Uncle Josef looks serious, a hint of humor surrounds his eyes. He seemed tall to me, although he was not, according to George; I just was short. He was well rounded in body and cheek, but not fat. Simply well fed. He was a man who knew how to enjoy life and did, including smoking his impressively long aromatic cigars after dinner. He was an architect by training and real estate developer by profession. George told me just recently that it was his father who had designed all the furniture in their apartment and then had it custom built by a craftsman. I inwardly smiled at that news; it meant that I recognized good design and craftsmanship even as a youngster. The Adler's generous life style, where money was appreciated, but where it was not the golden calf, appealed to me.

Uncle Josef also resembled Uncle Alfred in hair, little and straight, and manner. He was the *pater familias* who was sure of his position, with the rest of the family in supporting roles. There also was a difference. Uncle-Alfred-and-Aunt-Helene were suns of nearly equal brightness, but Aunt Edith seemed meek and deferential, so much so that I noticed it with unease. During occasional verbal jousts, the substance of which always eluded me, I hid my disquiet. I was used to women - my mother, Aunt Helene, and Mrs. Vonesch - who looked up to their husbands, in pride, not submissiveness.

Uncle Josef was generous not only with himself and his family, but also with me. There never was a hint that Aunt Edith did not share his generosity, although it was he who had the money in his pocket, a wad of bills and a jangle of coins. It was a rare visit, or none, when Uncle Josef did not squeeze a Franc into my hand as I bade good bye, thanking him from my heart, my stomach full, my spirits high.

Most, if not all years Switzerland was my home, I was the Adler's guest for Passover. To my great relief, we did not read the whole Hagada before we had some real food, not just the prescribed remembrances of times long ago, salt water, parsley, a hard-boiled egg, not for eating, biting horseradish and a lamb's naked shank bone. Even though I was 11 years old and older, Uncle Josef insisted that I search for the *Afikomen*, the hidden matzo, because I was the youngest at the table. He knew that I was cheerfully embarassed by this easy chore, but it was an excuse to enrich my pocket with not just one, but two or three Francs beyond the streetcar or train fare.

....

> We received a long letter from Werner today in which he mentioned that you were so kind and had a pair of boots soled for him. Many thanks for this kindness. You can imagine how much we would rather be doing this ourselves if it were granted that we could do so.
>
> (My mother, in a letter to the Adlers, 8 March, 1942)

[I'm pleased that I occasionally did write a long letter.]

....

The maid, too, was treated well, like family, always with courtesy and please and thank you. Never just do this or do that. I never heard a harsh word or a reprimand in front of the family, although, according to George, there were occasions when the maid's performance tested Uncle Josef's and Aunt Edith's patience. Still, one rule of etiquette remained unbroken: She did not eat with the family, but by herself in the kitchen.

I wish we had had the opportunity to welcome Uncle Josef to our home, as we did

Aunt Edith. He lived just four more years after I had left Switzerland.

Erich, the older son, already studied at the élite Gymnasium in Zurich when I still was in elementary school. He was the tallest of the family, a bit heavier than necessary, wore thick glasses and a modest mustache and never married. He was quiet, very quiet, introverted, the opposite of his father. He became an electrical engineer who helped make color televison a reality. With our 5-year difference in age and divergent interests, we interacted little beyond the dinner table.

Many years later, in 1980, when Joan and I visited Switzerland, the Erich I had known had transformed himself into an outgoing and charming host as he chauffeured us in his luxurious Citroen around northeast Switzerland so we could for the first time see the churning Rheinfall near Schaffhausen and this medieval city. This gorgeous fall day also is a bittersweet memory; he died less than a year later, felled by a heart attack, as had been both of his parents.

Georg and I got along famously. He was like an outgoing, generous, more sophisticated older brother. In his solicitude to make me feel at home and to entertain me, the two-year difference in age dissolved into nothing. He played records for me in his room, my first exposure to classical music, still my favorite and tried to teach me tennis at the club where he played. Most fun, he taught me to play bocce ball on the parking area in front of the garages. This Italian outdoor bowling game, where one aims to hit other players' balls, not pins, requires calm skill to play well, but my tyro's performance didn't spoil the game.

The Adlers lived not far from the Dolder, a resort on the Zürichberg, with a view over the city, lake, and what seemed like half of the country. The main attraction was not the view, which one almost takes for granted from many a hill in Switzerland, but the *Wellenbad*, the wave pool. I could hardly believe it when I first saw it, after a hike from the end of the tram line, from the edge of the pool and even after I rode the waves myself. Here were hundreds of bobbing heads in a huge pool where waves several feet high travelled from one end of the rectangle to the other and back, again and again, propelled by some mysterious force. That such a marvel existed and that I was priviledged to be carried by these waves, I, a poor kid in black wool swim trunks that fit too loosely, down, up over the crest and down again, among all these well-off youths and adults, was an adventure that still feels as fresh as the water on those summer days. No wonder I liked to visit the Adlers.

The tree-shaded Zurich zoo spread on a separate hill not far from the *Dolder Wellenbad*. Georg took me there once, when I was around fourteen. The usual fauna was on display, but the only animals I specifically remember were two little monkeys that lived in a glass-fronted cage to keep them in and gawkers' hands out.

These little tannish-white curiosities with touches of brown were busily grooming each other and made noises as if in animated conversation. Then, one hopped on the other and quickly bounced back and forth a few times. After the hopping had ended, I could tell that the one doing the hopping was a male since he was grooming his penis. I was fascinated. What was this all about? Georg's cheeks were flushed and he was evasive when I asked him, so I dropped the subject verbally, not internally. Not much later, in the center of Rütibühl, a farmer was holding a cow by a halter. To the rear of the cow bellowed a powerful bull held in check by a long rope, one end in his owner's hands, the other tied to the beast's nose ring. The master tapped a flank of his bull a few times with a cane. Then, suddenly, the bull mounted the cow and went through the same motions as had the monkey at the zoo, only with a force that seemed to almost buckle the cow. When the drama had ended, I retracted my eyeballs, turned around and walked wherever I was going. So it was that two little monkeys, a big bull and a placid cow laid the foundations of my sex education. Mysteries still abounded, but it was a start.

Aunt Cilli of lentil soup fame

Aunt Cilli Ehrlich, sister-in-law of Aunt Jenny, much older cousin of my mother, deserves her fame in my pantheon of relatives because she started a lasting love affair between me and lentil soup. It has been unsurpassed. It was thick, smooth, aromatic of lentils, plus what else I do not know, and satisfying. She served it many times I visited her; my compliments and appetite told her that I never tired of her creation.

Aunt Cilli had not married a rich man and he had died long before my time in Switzerland. She and Liesel, her daughter, lived modestly in a simple but neat apartment at Zeltweg 87, on the ground floor, not far from the Stadelhofer railway station. Aunt Cilli's relaxed, slightly elongated face was not harmed by her prominent straight nose; her naturally raised eyebrows lent her a slightly quizzical look in the photo I have. Her hairdo,
circa 1930, looks plastered to her head, with curling-iron waves lending sudued life.

Liesel, coiffed almost identically, attractive, in her forties, bore a soft smile over a prominent chin. However, below that smile resided a mind that kept me at bay. I never wanted to come too close to her, and, too close was closer than across the dining room table. Once, possibly twice, I could not escape planting a very reluctant kiss of greeting on one of her cheeks. I was told much later that she had some mental problem that kept her from functioning as would be expected. As a kid, I simply judged her ways as those of an old maid.

……

> I have to send something to Papa, so I am taking along this card for you. The former sends you many greetings. He can not write to you right now, but will catch up later on. To my horror, the passport had not been sent yet, but I assume now things will be in order. As I found out it will work out for me for sure, as far as one can predict such things. Aunt Cilli now can calm herself; I am very sorry that she worries so much.
>
> (My mother, in a letter, to me, 23 September, 1941)

……

The Bollags of Zurich

I was more intertwined with the Bollags, Uncle Victor, Aunt Martha, and their sons Jürg and Hanspeter, than with any other of my Swiss relatives.

Aunt Jenny had engineered my escape to Switzerland, paid the bills for me, and monitored my education. She had taken on a big load and left the more familial engagements to the Bollags, energetic, well-off business people. How gladly they took on the chore, I do not know; that they discharged it as well as they did, for that I am grateful, as I am for the involuntary lessons I learned in their midst.

Whether I rode the tram down from the Forch after having walked there from the Kinderheim, or rode my bike along the same road, the Forchstrasse, I eventually traversed the Bellevue Platz with its web of intersecting streetcar tracks, crossed the expansive Quaibrücke where Lake Zurich disgorges into the Limmat, then stayed on the right side of the Alpen Quai past the Tonhalle, the center of music in Zurich, and finally cut through neighborhood streets where apartments roosted on top of businesses and ended up at the Bollags on Tœdistrasse, number 50. When I walked, I just rang the bell, waited for the buzzer to signal an unlocked door and then, in hurried dignity, ascended the stairs to their flat. Running up the stairs seemed too crass. When I rode, I struggled my bike up the granite steps to the landing, squeezed my bike and myself through the heavy door, always ready to slam shut on me or on my bike, and finally leaned my wheels on the wall to the right before heading upstairs to be greeted by Hanspeter's welcoming grin.

As for his parents, I wish I could remember just smiling hours, hours that made me feel wanted, comfortable, at home.

Uncle Victor, a cousin of my father, was several inches taller than Aunt Martha, but it was Aunt Martha who loomed large. He was nearly bald, genial and mild; she was well-coiffed, domineering and loud. He would have liked to be generous; she was stingy. Even though I was the beneficiary of their joint hospitality, my swells of gratitude tended to be dampened by waves of noise and cheapness, the noise impinging on me without being its target, the cheapness stinging me directly. I found out much later, that they, together with Aunt Jenny, had labored generously and diligently against the morass of officialdom in their attempt to help my parents flee the Nazi yoke.

……

Dear Werner !

After a busy week of making hay, I again want to write a few lines to you, which I hope will find you healthy and happy. We were very happy to hear from Uncle Victor's most recent letter that our ship will leave on 10 August. However, the consulate does not give out any visas right now and our disappointment is, of course, great. But, we do not give up hope; the situation may change in the next few weeks. How is this matter with you? Did you go to the consulate and what did you have to do there? Might you possibly already have received the visa? If yes, there exists the possibility that you might start the trip before we do and I give you the good advice to do everything that Uncle Victor tells you regarding the Children's Aid Organization. A couple of weeks ago I let the relatives in the United States know that you might travel alone in the meantime (Uncle Alfred, Aunt Erna, Aunt Lilli, Aunt Anneliese, and Aunt Malchen) and all of them will be in contact with each other. You need not worry; you will be picked up and you will be told everything further. If that should happen, act accordingly and and show that you are a real, self-reliant, young man. We all know that you will live up to this occasion, too, and I am sure that you will not disappoint us. For today, fond greetings and a big kiss from your

Vati

Response coupon enclosed.

My dear Werner !

Last week we had great pleasure regarding the confirmation of our reservations, but now it's possible that "everything falls into the water" and that you may have to travel by yourself in the meantime. How happy we would be to have you again, as you can imagine, but, maybe, something still will work out, or at a later time. In any case, be brave, no matter what might come; we have to be, too, even if it is difficult. In case we get the news that we will receive the visa, you will get the news right away. In any case, we wish you everything good and send fond greetings and kisses.

Your Mutti

(Letter, 22 June, 1941)

We got mail from the USA; all are awaiting us, especially you. For now, there is nothing doing. That is unfortunate, especially for Papa.

(My mother, in a postcard to me, 21 August, 1941)

> I just finished a letter to Uncle Victor so I also want to think of you right away. He reserved the Cuba trip for us and simultaneously the traverse of Switzerland. But, now we first have to find out whether & when we will get the emigration visa. It now depends on that.
>
> (My mother, in a postcard to me, 17 November, 1941)

....

The maid, competent and mild-mannered, was a prime target for Aunt Martha's stinging tongue. The chicken soup was too hot or it was too cold; it was too salty or too bland. To me it always tasted nearly the same, delicious, as good a broth as I had eaten when I still was at home with my parents. If the maid tried to rein in rambunctious Hanspeter, she was overbearing, if she did not, she did not follow instructions. *Ad infinitum.* Uncle Victor would try to calm Aunt Martha, to little effect. I could do nothing but grit my teeth, one underdog silently sympathizing with another one, followed by a quick hug in the kitchen, later on. That was not how my family had treated our maid; that was not how any of my other relatives who employed them treated their maids.

Aunt Martha was consistent. Once, when Hanspeter and I ventured to visit at the blouse atélier his parents owned, because I was curious what it was like, I was startled by the near demonic rush with which Aunt Martha dominated the place. She yelled here, she yelled there, her sound puffing her up to appear bigger and taller than the slight women she was. By contrast, Uncle Victor was an island of calm. I was embarassed to witness this repugnant circus, especially since the cutters and sewers and any other worker who dared to look up could tell that I, having come with Hanspeter, was a relative of the bosses. We neither lingered nor did I ever chance another visit to this hectic domain.

Speaking of embarassment. One evening, as the Voneschs and I sat around the dining table in the kitchen and told about the day's events, Mr. Vonesch opened with "What a bitch!!" He had been called to replace a pane in the downstairs entry door of a residence in one of the better neighborhoods of Zurich. While he diligently worked, a little women standing on the landing above kept yelling "Aren't you done yet?" "Why aren't you done yet?" "When will you be done?" And, when he was done "You charge way too much!" He kept fuming in workaday Schwyzerdüetsch while spooning his soup "She, that damned bitch, is darn lucky I didn't ring her neck! It took all my willpower to get out of there before I did!" As Mr. Vonesch fumed, I could feel blood rise to my cheeks. I would have liked to slide under the table or become invisible. I had come to realize from his description of place and person that he had encountered Aunt Martha in full blow. How humiliating! A relative of mine not only had behaved so miserably, but toward someone I admired, a man of skill and hard work. If she knew who he was, she did not care. He had no clue who she was until he saw me shrink into my chair. The Voneschs ended up sympathizing with me, that I was stuck with a shrewish relative like that.

That cheapness bothered me; no one else I had ever known was so tight. They, the Bollags, enjoyed skiing vacations at alpine resorts in winter and they hiked in the mountains in summer. Hanspeter regaled me with his accomplishments on those vacations. But would they ever have asked me to come along? Of course not. I resented that exclusion. I was good enough to entertain Hanspeter at home, but was not needed at some fun place I would have loved to visit, below the shiny peaks I saw from the distance, just an hour or at most two away by train, but at infinity for me. In restrospect, I know my frustrated expectation was unreasonable, but at that time, I was disappointed. However, it was the little niggardly pricks that stung and stung more often, just about every time I was invited, for a day or longer. At first, Uncle Victor would hand me 50 Rappen or even a Franc as I bid good bye and thanked sincerely and politely. Then, as time passed, he did not, at least not every time. Finally, I caught on: Money when Aunt Martha was out of sight; no money when she stood near.

When one depends on the kindness of strangers, especially when they are relatives, one learns to swallow words, sentences, whole speeches.

Not all was disappointment at the Bollags, far from it. I also enjoyed myself with the Bollags, particularly when we hiked up to the Uetliberg, a prominence at the northern tail of the range of wooded hills that rises from the south shore of the Zurichsee. We rode the street car to the end of the line, snacks packed by the maid in a backpack or two, our spirits high. Hanspeter and I out front, Jürg in the middle or not there at all, the adults last, we headed up the wooded trail, steep at times, gentle at others. We two boys had little patience with the twists and turns of the trail, so we shortened the distance between serpentines by heading straight up, when we could. We learned to dig in our heels and spread our feet so we would not slide backward. We imagined ourselves as mountain goats, undaunted by rocks or grade. When we reached the top, about 1500 feet above the lake, we had conquered the mountain and the view was fabulous. The lake lay at our feet; to the horizon spread seemingly half of verdant gently rolling northwestern Switzerland; glistening streams wended their way toward the Rhine. Opposite, toward the southeast lay green valleys and forested ranges; mirage-like white peaks rose in the far distance. I still can see and savor that expanse that then lay before me.

After some milk for us boys and a beer for the adults to wash down the sandwiches at the restaurant that marked the end of the trail, we reversed course, toward the city below. Downhill, we boys stayed on the trail. Slipping backward on the way up was one thing, tumbling down head-first might have been painful. I am no mountain climber and never was, but a stony trail under my boots or a needle-cushioned path evokes grand memories of my childhood, with my parents and with others, and lets me indulge in nature, living and dead.

Hanspeter was about four years younger than I and Jürg about four years older. Being immature for my age, I had much more in common with Hanspeter than with Jürg. To Hanspeter, I was the playmate his brother was not; to me he was a younger cousin whose parents expected me to keep him amused.

Hanspeter was a spoiled, rascally kid who was fun to be with most of the time. The glint in his eyes dimmed when he whined about something or other he either wanted and did not get right away or did not want. Why wouldn't a kid whine when his parents caved in every time he did? Sitting at the table as an invited guest, and a youngster at that, I had to keep my thoughts from breaking into spoken words. He complained about food that tasted great and was ample and his parents more likely bawled out the maid for some imagined fault than Hanspeter for being a pain. That spoiled-rotten behavior and the "yes, darling, what else?" capitulation by the parents tested my self discipline to near the bursting point. Whining sets my nerves on edge, now as then; just ten seconds seems like an eternity.

I had been taught to obey our maid just as I would my parents. Hanspeter ignored the maid and obeyed his parents, reluctantly. Once, we had a ball bouncing up and down on our beds - I shared Hanspeter's room when I stayed over night - between waking and breakfast. The maid rushed in and told us to cut it out; it ruined the mattresses and we were too noisy. I stopped. He kept on bouncing until his mother came in yelling, with fervor.

Between meals, when Uncle Victor and Aunt Martha were at work, we were on our own. Then we explored. We made central Zurich, the liveliest part of town, bounded by the lake, the River Sihl, the main railway station, up to the Ræmistrasse, and back down to the Bellevue Plaza and the lake, our playground, just as my friends and I had made Mindelheim ours. One of our favorite hangouts was the Hauptbahnhof, where we watched the crowds rush about, onto trains and out of train and admired the enormous engines with their powerfully sculptured spoked wheels being coupled to and uncoupled from the string of coaches behind them. We liked the express trains the best, where men in suits and ties and women under hats climbed aboard, ambled down the corridors of first class coaches and disappeared into what we imagined to be luxurious compartments. We read the metal placards hung on the outside of each car with the intermediate stops and final destinations in black on white: Bern - Lausanne - Gene`ve; Luzern - Lugano -

Domodossola; Schaffhausen - Basel; to us, all far off places. Then, at precisely the hour and minute listed on the time tables plastered on kiosks, the track master blew his whistle, raised one arm and slowly waved back and forth a baton that terminated in a white round disk with a green rim, like a flattened sucker. The engineer responded with a toot of the horn and the electric train started to roll, quietly, smoothly; no jerks or puffs of steam.

Our vicarious travels satisfied, we joined the rush to the exits, turned left, crossed the Bahnhof Brücke, and explored the cobble-stoned streetlets and alleys on the north side of the Limmat. We watched people amble and rush, gawked into display windows where watches - ladies', men's and children's - or every imaginable kind of knife tempted us. We took in the decorated facades, elaborate signs of inns and stores in three- and four-story buildings that had survived centuries of seasons and had seen nightwatchmen with halbards, the burghers of the Reformation and now looked down on us, two curious boys. Here, history, always one of my favorite subjects, escaped from the confines of class rooms to surround and loom above us as we wandered about these narrow streets. If we did not stray clear down to the lake, we crossed the Rathaus Brücke, the City Hall Bridge, flanked by the simply shaped but elaborately frescoed dominion of the city fathers, stopped to be impressed close up by the twin towers and gothic bulk of the Grossmünster cathedral before we crossed the Bahnhofstrasse and then headed back to the Tœdistrasse in time for the Mittag- or the Abendessen, the midday or evening meal.

Neither we, nor Hanspeter's parents ever even considered that we might lose ourselves in the maze of the old city; the hill on the north, the lake toward the east, the River Sihl on the south side of our city, the railroad station westward and, in the center, the Limmat and the spires of the churches, all told us where we were. All we had to do was watch out for traffic. The rumbling blue and white streetcars, trucks, and pesky motorcycles announced themselves; cars were not abundant because of gasoline rationing; just bicyclists were a silent hazard as riders flitted by in front of our noses as they turned a corner.

We must have entertained ourselves inside some of the time when downpours or wintry slush rendered streets and alleys uninviting. What we played left no trace.

Unlike his younger brother, happy-go-lucky, a grin on his face and pampered by his parents, Jürg was far from spoiled. He wore a frown much of the time. He may have had reason to frown. Nearly every meal seemed like an invitation to an argument, often about his lackluster performance in school. Most Jewish parents, rightly or wrongly, expect every one of their offspring to excel in their studies, or at least make the effort. Jürg did not satisfy either demand. I don't know whether his lackadaisical approach to learning was the only source of the battles between his parents and him, or whether it just provided the nozzle from which to shoot other resentments. Whatever the causes or excuses, these meal-time recriminations embarassed me, rather than the combatants, as should have been the case, but they did not spoil my appetite.

That discord surfaced with me in their midst might have meant that I was part of the family, and no restraint was required; else, I didn't count, as if I were but a shell with a big appetite. I hope I practiced the lesson I learned at the Bollag's table: Contentious verbiage should be bottled up until the dessert plates are empty.

The Zurich Bollags will pop up again, but, now on to Lausanne, where Uncle Victor's brother and his family lived.

The Bollags of Lausanne

What a contrast! Hard-edged and sometimes tight Aunt Martha in Zurich, congenial and generous Bollags in Lausanne, in the French-speaking canton of Vaud, on the shores of Lake Geneva. Uncle Siegfried, Aunt Claire and their children, Gaston and Doris engendered some of my fondest memories of the years of loss, as my parents desperately and in vain tried avenue after avenue to escape Germany.

....

> You can imagine how unpleasant it is for me to again have to bother our sponsor.... (because of problems with the American consulate in Stuttgart). Again a chance for hope dashed....because I have not yet given up courage and faint hope.
>
> (My father in a letter to the Heilbronners, 25 December, 1940)

....

One shiny summer day I met Uncle Siegfried at the Bollag's in Zurich where he picked me up for my first vacation away from the Kinderheim or from Zurich. Travel fever speeded my pulse. Not just the thrill of having been invited, but invited to a place far away, to a city I knew only as a circle and a name on a map, to a destination spelled out on a train, by people I did not know. What would it be like? What would they be like? I was eager to find out.

We, Uncle Siegfried and I, walked to the Hauptbahnhof. A bit weary we arrived at the station where I wistfully had read the destinations on the side of rail cars, places I thought I never might see. And here it was, a coach to "Lausanne - Gene`ve", our coach, marked by a big 2, for second class. We climbed aboard, suitcases in hand, found our upholstered seats, not wooden benches as in third class of local trains. Uncle Siegfried motioned me the window so I could look forward, ahead to the scenery that would unfold during the next two and one half hours.

A whistle, a responding toot and along we glided, with just a mild clatter across innumerable switches where the tracks fanned out beyond the station, to the right, to the left, and straight ahead. Soon we had passed the industrial fringe of Zurich, plain, uninteresting, but not messy, and rolled past green pastures, orchards and field crops, past villages and farms with home gardens. On we moved, stopping at a city now and then to discharge and take on passengers. The Bollag's maid had packed us a snack, although I would have loved to feast in the dining car, at a table with a little vase of flowers by the window, just like those Hanspeter and I had spied on stopped express trains as we nosed about the platform in Zurich. Such a luxury was out of reach. But, did I ever enjoy it when, about 40 years later, Joan sat across from me at a white-linen-covered table as we ate sausages and roasted potatoes in the dining car of an Intercity train as it sped above the Rhine from Holland to Switzerland. A dream become real.

Back to the train to Lausanne, next to Uncle Siegfried.

About two hours out of Zurich, a rush of darkness. We had entered a tunnel. Then the flare of brilliant sunshine and a panorama the likes of which I had never seen before. There, before my eyes and below spread slopes of bright green vineyards compartmentalized by low stone walls, stepwise, right down to the glistening surface of Lake Geneva. Beyond the water, the black-green forested shore of France rose steeply to the sky with just a few dots of villages along the lake. What a view! It was a new world of beauty, the best of nature and of tillers of the soil. It was a sight I eagerly anticipated and that thrilled me just as much when the train burst from that tunnel, with Joan by the window, on our way to Lausanne to retrace a chapter of my youth, years after my erstwhile hosts had died.

The train gradually descended and slowed as it reached the limits of Lausanne. Uncle Siegfried retrieved our suitcases from the rack above our seats and by the time the wheels had stopped, we were by the door ready to greet and be greeted by the reception committee of Gaston and Doris, a duo of cousins I had never met before. They welcomed us in German, but French permeated the air around us. I was in the francophone part of Switzerland, like in another country, and understood nothing.

We somehow reached Avenue Dapples 15, where the Bollags lived on the first floor of a plain stone building in a middle-class neighborhood well above but without a view of Lake Geneva, not even from the little balcony that fronted on the street. At the door we were greeted not by a maid, they had none, but by Aunt Claire's gracious smile and "*Bienvenue*!".- Welcome! The inside of the apartment is a mystery, except for the kitchen, where we'll stop later.

In spite of our trip together and in spite of the vacations I enjoyed in Lausanne, Uncle Siegfried is more pale memory than substance. He was balding, like his brother, with a gentle face, slightly sad even. He was four years older than Uncle Victor but seemed like a younger, even deferential sib. My mental portrait may be blurred because of Uncle Siegfried's frequent absences: As an infantry captain in the Swiss army, he was home only occasionally from the beginning of World War II in 1939 to its end in 1945. Was his demeanor born of a milder personality or was it engendered by the lesser financial success than Uncle Victor and Aunt Martha had achieved? For me, his bank account was of no import; I appreciated the calm and warmth of the family circle. No scorn, no bitching, no cheapness. Necessary frugality, yes, but generosity of spirit pervaded the home. These Bollags never made me feel like a poor relation. When I visited, I was part of the family.

Aunt Claire's simply draped hair framed a face that had known work and worry. About what she worried, I do not know, may be just the usual concerns about family and budget. She was neither naturally cheerful nor dour. Above all, she was considerate and quiet, almost too quiet for me, used as I was to families where thoughts readily burst into words.

Aunt Claire quickly made me feel at home, right down to the twice-daily chore of drying dishes and once even helping turn currants into jam. These perkily delicious spherical shiny red berries, smaller than a pea, are strung out in loose clusters a few inches long. The trick was to detach the little spheres from their pedicels without also pulling off these green anchors that were inadmissible in jam. The tool of choice, really the only one, was a regular dinner fork. Fingers were too large, awkward and slow for the task. Aunt Claire taught me how to drag the tines through a cluster of currants, neither too fast and vigorous, else too many pedicels would come along, nor so slowly as to test her patience. I knew that the reward would be a treat on the breakfast bread, but scooting these little gems off their clusters while I sat on a stool at the white enamelled kitchen table seemed to take forever and tested my patience. That is where Aunt Claire was tough: no escape from duty, no matter how much I fidgeted. The fact that Doris, three years older than I, also was stuck with this tedium was no consolation. But, tug by tug, the bowl of berries grew fuller and the pile of stripped clusters larger until we finally were done. Now, Doris and I were released and Aunt Claire did what ever she did to turn the raw berries into jam. Interested as I was in kitchen business, I had no desire to watch, I just wanted to get out of there, to explore.

And, explore we did, Doris and I, around Lausanne, the old tight quarter with its cathedral, up, down and along twisting streets, all the way to Ouchy (*ooshy*, more or less), the elegant suburb tucked between the city and Lake Geneva, where beaches and waves invited. We could either walk down to the beach or take the little cog train that eased the steepest part of the descent, and, especially ascent. No centimes were forthcoming from Aunt Claire to pay for the easy way: "You are young and walking is good for you." True. Still, riding the little red box with the big windows would have been fun. So we clattered down I don't know how many steps.

After the stair-step exercise, the reward lay before us: a broad expanse of sandy shore dotted with bright beach umbrellas. We headed for the changing rooms, Doris to "*Dames*", I to "*Messieurs*". I knew no French on this, my first visit to Lausanne, but bit by bit, the new and nasal words stuck in my mind.

We had brought along a rubber ring, between and inch and two thick and about eight inches in diameter, the favorite beach toy for those who had progressed beyond tossing a beach ball back and forth. We ran into the water, some distance apart and slung the ring to each other. Catching it was basic; catching it with style, not just stopping it in flight or grabbing it, earned extra points in self esteem. Having the ring drop over the outstretched fist and letting it twirl down the arm was the equivalent of a ringer in horse-shoe pitching. Skipping the ring on the water's surface, just like a flat stone, to maximally splash the opponent without hitting her or him in the face added refreshing spice to the fun. We also swam, I mostly parallel to the beach and not much beyond where I could stand and still breath, because I did not trust my swimming ability further out. Doris was a much stronger swimmer than I and swam well beyond me, until I just saw her head bob on the surface.

When we spied one of the white lake steamers that plied the waters from one end of Lake Geneva to the other, we waited for the rolling wake to approach, then, when the crests and troughs reached us, we flipped on our backs and rode the gentle waves as they travelled shoreward. We were kids and relished the day. Were we ever ready for dinner after a few hours of water, sand and sun!

Gaston, Doris' brother, five years older than I, just like Erich Adler, resembled him amazingly, not just in age, although they were not related. Both were fairly tall and solidly built, both were studying engineering, both were quiet, introverted and distant from me, at least as much by personality as by age difference. This distance narrowed when Gaston asked me to test him when he crammed for an exam. We sat on straight-backed wooden chairs out on the little balcony that overlooked the street, he on one side, I on the other, facing each other. I held the book with the questions and the answers, one question after the other; a moment of thought and the answer came forth, almost invariably correct. He impressed me as being very smart and was pleased that he asked me to help him prepare for whatever exam he was about to face although I knew nothing of the subjects he pondered. If the questions had been in French, I couldn't have helped him until my second visit. The first time I knew neither language nor subject matter; after that, only the topics were totally foreign to me. Gaston, just like the rest of the family and any other Swiss with a reasonable education was bilingual. A monolingual Swiss was and is considered uneducated.

My first week in Lausanne, I nosed about mostly in the company of Doris because I was intimidated by my lack of French. What if I did get lost and had no way of finding out where I was or where I should be heading? After all, I had never been anywhere except where some variation of German had been spoken and I wasn't brash enough to approach a stranger with a question in German. By the second week, and, mainly during later summers, after I had acquired a smattering of French in high school, I mostly roamed alone, comfortable that I knew my way or could make myself understood, if necessary. Also, by then, Doris, three years older than I, may have had better things to do than shepherd her young and indirect cousin around town.

When Aunt Claire thought my French was good enough, she entrusted me with errands to the neighborhood grocery store and bakery. The grocery was simple. I had a list; I handed it to the clerk; the clerk picked the goods off the shelf, set them on the counter next to the cash register, added the prices on a slip of paper where I could see the numerals, and then stashed whatever I bought into two canvas bags Aunt Claire had given me. I paid, made sure I received the correct change, and after a Schwyzerdüetsch-accented "*Au revoir*", I proudly marched back to Avenue Dapples 15, a bag dangling from each hand.

A day or two later, my pride exceeded my French. Aunt Claire had sent me to the bakery for "six longues" (*si*, as in sibling, with a silent x). In fluent French, the two words compress into one - *silongues*, unlike in German, where it would have been *sechs Lange*, or in English, six long ones. I had no clue what Aunt Claire wanted me to fetch, but was too proud to admit it. I figured I would just repeat what she had said and the bakery lady would hand me whatever it was. It wasn't that simple. I botched the pronounciation and the lady behind the counter was puzzled. "*Quesque vous voudrais*?" a bit exasperated by the third time. Finally, after my cheeks were red and watery beads clung to my nose, the lady caught on and put six long narrow loves of bread into my bag. Everyone, except I, with my novice French, knew what *six longues* meant, baguettes of course. By the time I reached home, my cheeks no longer felt flushed, the perspiration had evaporated and I was relieved.

When I told Aunt Claire about my misadventure, in German, she laughed and told me: "Never be afraid to admit if you don't know something or ask if you don't understand". Ever after, I tried to practice what she preached, but found the first half harder than the second.

The next time we needed *six longues*, I knew what they were and how to intelligibly slur the words together. The sales lady and I exchanged knowing smiles, bread and money, before I left behind the enticing aroma that envelopes bakeries where fine ingredients combined with skill draw in customers. It's an elegant aroma, subtle, not overweaning and almost sickening like that from bakeries where cheap ingredients are masked by excess sugar.

With my improved French, I was at ease by myself as I checked out old Lausanne and the central railway station, just like in Zurich, admiring the herculean engines with their multiplicity of wheels as mechanics squirted oil into ball-bearing cups. Here too, I travelled vicariously on to Geneva or up to Zermatt, and watched spiffily-dressed gentlemen and ladies, workers and young women with children, hurry to their compartments. One time, my nosiness was rewarded infinitely beyond my expectations. There, behind a greenish-tinted pane, in a 1st class compartment, stood General Guisan, unmistakable in face, in his cylindrical gold embroidered cap, the one and only general of the Swiss Army, its top commander, the one charged with defending Switzerland from any German invasion, and he was waving and smiling, somewhat condescendingly I thought, at me. The same wave and smile undoubtedly also was meant to the others in the little knot of people on the platform who had spied him, but it was I who stood the closest to his window. Condescending or not, I had seen the most famous Swiss soldier, in person, not just in a picture, that is what counted.

When I walked to the beach without Doris, I lingered along the Swiss Riviera of Ouchi to ogle the monumental resort hotels with their impeccably manicured lawns and gloriously colorful expanses of flowers. How I would have loved to look inside these guest palaces, or even have a snack in there. Now way. Never. But, I did enjoy stopping in their aura, admiring their sumptious presence. The gates to a few of these hotels were shut. War raged throughout Europe, except for the island of the Swiss; there were no foreign tourists to warm the beds. Silence prevailed, sad silence, but not on all of this summer's nights.

As we sit out on the balcony on this still summer night of 1944, the year before the defeat of the Nazi regime, we clearly hear the report of small arms fire and, occasionally, of larger weapons from across Lake Geneva, in France. The deadly exchanges are between the German occupiers and the Maquis, the French underground fighters, at most 6 or 7 miles from where we savored the refreshing air, on the peaceful side of the water.

Doris' bike became my bike while I vacationed at her home. If she objected to this temporary expropriation, she kept it from me. Who suggested it I don't know, but it was a great idea. One day, right after breakfast, Aunt Claire packed me a lunch and I set out for Vevey, a quiet resort city about 12 miles upstream on the lake. I left Lausanne behind me in 15 minutes or less as I rolled down toward Lake Geneva between the very vineyards that I had admired after we, Uncle Siegfried and I, had emerged from the railway tunnel on our trip from Zurich. The scenery could not have been lovelier. Rows upon rows of lucent green vines supported by rough stubby trunks that had weathered many summers and winters, all in patches divided by stone walls, some just hip high, down from the shore of the lake to nearly the crest of the range that protect the south, sun-facing slope from chilling north winds.

Before long, I reached the lake-side road, two lane and paved, that connected cities and villages along the water. I found a little park where I sat on a bench, took out one of my sandwiches and let my eyes skip up, down and across the gentle ripples of Lac Léman, the French name of Lake Geneva. I washed down the bread and cheese with gulps of water from a fountain, saddled up again and pumped along on the far right of the narrow road, out of the way of the occasional car or truck, toward Vevey, my destination. A park shaded by large trees and brightened by beds of flowers along the quai invited. I leaned my bike against a bench, sat down, enjoyed another sandwich and wished I could ride all the way to Montreux and, even better, to the Castle of Chillon, where Lord Byron's famous prisoner had languished. We had been told this romantic story in school and had to memorize a stanza or two of Byron's poem, in German translation. But, those attractions were too far for a one-day ride on a heavy single-speed girl's bicycle.

It was not until 40 years later that I reached Montreux, with Joan and by train. The resort was just as romantically beautiful as I then had imagined, with stately tourist hotels, pampered gardens and luxuriating guests. We nosed about until we had to catch our train to Interlaken, across the mountains. My nose led us to a café-patisserie where we inhaled the aroma and let dwell in our mouths the finest coffee we ever had tasted and where we indulged in incredibly delicate creamy pastry. Were these creations so extraordinary by realized design, or was it the romantic circumstance of a realized dream that glorified them?

The leisure time in Vevey soon ended and I had to retrace my route if I were to reach home by supper. The pumping was easy on the level road along the lake. A little more than half way, I stopped for a last snack, a chocolate bar and slice of bread with which Aunt Claire had favored me, energy for the uphill push from lake to city. The main road rose gently enough, but I followed safer and unfamiliar country lanes, some of which were steep enough to force me off the bike and walk. No hay wagons to hang on to in this country of vines.

My legs were tired, my stomach empty; my mind was filled with the rush of the day. The excitement returned when I surveyed the scenery more than five decades later when Joan and I whipped along the same route, just yards distant, on an Intercity express. Only, this time, as we travelled down the Valley of the Rhone, the Castle of Chillon rushed toward me on our left, unmistakable with its dunce cap-roofed round turrets and its boxy walled compound that rises out of and is reflected on the surface of the lake. I finally had seen that famous fortress, live.

Vevey was fun, Echallens an experience.

Aunt Claire's parents lived in Echallens, a village about nine miles north of Lausanne and on the other side of the ridge. We, Doris and I, had been invited to come and spend the day on their farm. On a bright summer day, with only a few white clouds interrupting the blue of the sky, Doris saddled up on Gaston's bike and I on hers. We turned right and headed northwest until we reached the main road to Echallens. Pedalling was slow up the long rise to the crest. There, we stopped and looked back, down on the city and across Lake Geneva to the foothills of the French Alps. Far beyond, a white triangle peeked above one of the ridges, Mt. Blanc, the highest peak in Europe. Every Swiss school kid knew its name and where it is; I now had seen it, in nature, not just in pictures. It was a lucky day, Doris told me; on most days, even sunny ones, summer haze and clouds obscure the peak from our distance.

After that satisfaction, we breezed the rest of the way, mostly downhill, to Echallens, with Doris in the lead. Near the edge of the village, she turned left onto a gravel courtyard. We had arrived at her grandparents' sturdy farmhouse, plaster below and wood above, brightend by window boxes almost covered with red flowers. Across the farm yard, behind our backs, were a stable and large barn, its wide boards brown with a soft velvety patina elaborated by time and weather.

We leaned our bikes against the house and turned toward the door where Doris' grandmother, Julie Seligman, greeted us with open arms and a welcoming "*Bienvenue*!" Like a proper farmwife, she was dressed simply, in a long skirt protected by a large apron that reached from waist to ankles. How she looked I do not remember; how she was I do: hospitable. A snack of buttered country rye and a tall glasses of milk vanished as we told about our ride across the hill and the joy of having spied Mt. Blanc. In deference to me, grandmother spoke German with French phrases and words interspersed so I could make them part of my vocabulary if I paid attention. I did. I was as eager to learn French as to please.

Acquaintance made and snack downed, Doris showed me the stable that housed just a cow or two, a calf, plus a few horses. Doris' grandfather was horse trader; the cows provided milk and cream for the family, the horses a living. Those in the stable were transients, temporary guests between one owner and the next. Then, on to the barn where hay was piled high, at least half way up to the rafters. We and a neighbors' kids who had come to check me out climbed up to the heights and then jumped down into the loose hay with gusto; from there, we slid down to the ground on our rears, as if on a slope covered with snow. Then up the ladder again and down, raising dust and noise. Doris at first hesitated; after all, she was a teenager heading toward a young lady, but she got into the kid spirit and joined us boys. After a while, a call from grandmother announced *le déjeuner*, the midday repast. We brushed the hay off our clothes and hair, sneezed out the hay barn dust and washed our faces and hands; the friends took off for their houses and Doris and I hurried to the kitchen where the table was set. There was no war-time rationing of butter or milk, of bread or meat. We were on a farm.

Doris' grandfather, Benoi^t, appeared later in the day from wherever he had been. His face, too, has disappeared, just his good humor remains. We, Doris and I, regaled him with words of our morning's ride and fun in the barn.

The morning had been ours, first on our bikes, then in the barn. The afternoon brought work. On this farm everyone worked, including invited guests. Doris' grandparents cultivated a large garden where fruit trees, vegetables and berries provided for the family, the part in Echallens and that in Lausanne. The red currants were ripe and we were assigned to pick them. Grandmother handed each of us a mesh basket with a hinged handle and paper on the bottom so the berries would not get hung up in the mesh. My eyes lit up when I saw the bright red bunchlets dangle on the canes. We plucked cluster after cluster and dropped them into the basket. An occasional one would find its way into my mouth, not the whole bundle, just the berries. The technique is simple: You hold the cluster by the pedicel and drag it between the almost closed clamp formed by the upper and lower front teeth. With minimal practice, the berries roll onto the tongue and the green handles stay outside. Were these little beads ever delicious, sweet and perky! Helping in the garden, under blue sky patched with white clouds, was a pleasure, freedom, compared to sitting at the kitchen table forking berries into a bowl.

Conscience and duty kept me from eating too many currants as I picked. Besides, I knew that they would be our dessert, sprinkled with sugar and coated with cream. Talk about *Genussfressen*, eating for pleasure, pure and simple.

The garden also featured black currants and white ones. The flavor of the white ones has escaped me; the black ones were superb, even better than their red cousins, less acid, more elegantly flavored, a singular treat.

Gooseberries also vied for attention and they certainly got mine. Fully ripe red gooseberries even outranked red currants on my pleasure scale; their flavor is deeper, more lasting. Gooseberry jam slathered on top of butter spread over a thick breakfast slice of bread, what an exquisite memory of an overnight stay on the farm in Echallens.

However many times I was invited to cross the ridge to Echallens, each visit lifted my spirits. I revelled in being spoiled, even if just for a day at a time, even if not by my parents who were less than four train hours to the northeast, but unreachably far.

....

> ..... You can imagine how happy we are that our Werner temporarily is cared for so well. The lady appears to be very nice to him and everywhere he finds friends and generous people. Of course we hope to have him with us again sometime this year because we do not know whether or not Mrs. Vonesch will be take care of him so well in the future. .....
>
> (Letter, my mother to the Heilbronners, 19 January, 1941)

....

The Seligmans of Echallens, Julie and Benoi^t, are engraved in my grateful memory. They live on in their good deeds.

Bern, bears, and the Oettingers

One of the years I lived in Switzerland, out of nowhere, I received a letter inviting me to spend Easter vacation in Bern. The letter was signed by a Ludwig Oettinger, to me a complete stranger. My mother had mentioned him in a letter to me quite a while earlier, but that made him no less of a stranger, because we never had met. How he and his wife Grete were related to me, and any other details, mattered little to me. To be invited to Bern, the capital of Switzerland, that was what was important. Of course, I accepted with pleasure and gratitude in likely the quickest return letter I ever wrote as a boy.

Uncle Ludwig asked me to meet him at the railroad station in Mænnedorf, where I then lived, suitcase by my side, so we then could take the next train to Zurich and there transfer to an express for Bern. If he described himself to me, he likely mentioned his almost totally bald head and age, late middle or higher. Unlike some of my other rail journeys, the one to Bern left no trace. Only the destination did. We somehow arrived at their apartment at Mühlemattstrasse 14, several long blocks from the railway station, where Tante Grete (aunt, here, like uncle, in the universal sense) greeted me as if my coming decidedly had not been her idea. Maybe I remember so little specific about either of them because I spent little time with them, just a few days, and then I mostly explored the city on my own, after Uncle Ludwig had introduced me to the famous bears of Bern.

The Bernese have had a love affair with bears for centuries. Whether the bears appreciated the affection is impossible to tell; the three or four they had and still have might rather have roamed in the forest than be confined in the *Bærengraben*, the bear pit, a deep and wide open-air cylinder with a high enough rail to keep their admirers from becoming their victims. The stone lining of the cylinder was interruped by several large iron doors, the gates to the bears' private quarters. The Bærengraben was built in the 1700s to commemorate the founder of the city who had killed a bear on the site in 1191, a time when North America was unknown to all but its natives and a few Vikings.

After that first excursion, the bears kept attracting me. No matter which street or alley I explored, I ended up at the bear pit, crossing the lazy Aare on the Unterbrücke on the way there and the Nydeggbrücke on my way back to the Oettingers, or vice versa. When Joan and I retraced some of my steps, we quickly checked in at our hotel and then headed to the bear pit to visit what may have been direct descendants of my erstwhile friends. To walk on the stones of my youth, together with Joan, to point out what I still remembered and to see anew what had escaped, joined the past with the present and enhanced the wondrous memory and the glowing now.

Following that one and only visit with the Oettingers and after my obligatory but heartfelt bread-and-butter letter, they soon faded away. Although my memory of Uncle Ludwig and Aunt Grete is faint, their welcome gift of a few days in Bern clearly lives.

The Feinsteins of the new shoes

The Bahnhofstrasse is the glamour avenue of Zurich, lined with banks and with watch and fashion emporia; it's an avenue that exudes quiet elegance. Here the Feinsteins' pharmacy served the public. Aunt Selma, the sister of the Bollag brothers, Victor and Siegfried, and, therefore, a niece of my grandmother Mina, was a motherly-looking, buxom lady with graying hair and a warm demeanor. She hosted the same streak of generosity that inspired Uncle Siegfried and Uncle Victor.

Uncle Hans, distinguished looking with his white carefully trimmed hair and an avuncular smile behind his wire-frame glasses, shared his wife's sentiments.

I saw the Feinsteins infrequently and then only at the pharmacy, never in their home. When they had sked me to come by - I never felt close enough to just drop in - a few Francs always would end up in my pocket, given quietly without a hint of condescension. One time, more than just a few francs came my way, or more specifically, they came to my feet's rescue. I had outgrown the various pairs of shoes that my mother had packed for me. To get new shoes was a big deal; they were expensive. I was relieved that Uncle Hans had been elected to take me to the store; he would and did buy me sturdy shoes that fit.

Aunt Selma and Uncle Hans. To them, like to the Bollags of Lausanne, I was a relative, unmodified by circumstance.

Quite an assortment, these relatives of mine. The actions of some only were plusses; with some, minuses diminished them. All taught me some valuable lessons for life, some intentionally, some inadvertently. Some I wanted to emulate, others avoid. All eased my years alone in Switzerland, in ways big and small. I appreciated their deeds of kindness and learned to go on, forward, in spite of a some disappointments.

At the time, I took things as they came. I had no influence over them other than possibly paving the way to more good deeds with my cheerful thanks and polite demeanor. The network of relatives functioned, almost mysteriously, in providing necessities and some pleasures and in making me realize, much later, the cushioning comfort provided by well-tended family ties.

A new school, again

I was about to run out of school in Wetzwil; five grades was all it offered. Herrliberg, the nearest village, on the shore of Lake Zurich, would be my next school-days destination. I rarely had ventured down there from Rütibühl; it simply was too far for a casual visit, at least twice the distance between home and my one-room school in Wetzwil. That distance turned out to be a major problem for Mrs. Vonesch, Aunt Jenny, the Zurich Bollags, and the Kinderhilfe, all of whom administered my existence. I would take the change in stride, in many strides, down early in the morning, up the hill at day's end. From Wetzwil, I was able to hustle home for the mid-day meal and be back in class in time for the afternoon session. From Herrliberg, that was impossible. Where was I to eat? I could not go all day without and carrying a lunch was not an option. There was no place to eat it in school or elsewhere. Home was the place where kids ate their Mittagessen, as did their parents. I could not reach home and a restaurant was not even a consideration. Kids did not eat in restaurants by themselves; besides, the cost would have been unbearable; modern fast food had not yet been invented and I had no relatives in Herrliberg. What to do? Consternation and much discussion, most of it out of my sight and hearing, for which I was grateful. I just needed a set table for my mid-day meal.

Lucie had eaten at the Vonesch's butcher, but not gratis; a free lunch is what all the money people wanted for me. Somehow, Pfarrer Schlatter, pastor of the Protestant church, and his wife were found, recruited, persuaded, designated or otherwise induced to be my hosts for Mittagessen every school day. They may gladly have volunteered once they knew about my need. As welcome as they made me feel and as friendly as they were, I suppose a little persuasion may have been needed to have a hungry stranger as their regular noon-time guest. The only compensation the Schlatters received for feeding me several times a week was the satisfaction of having performed a charitable deed and, maybe, the entertainment provided by a chatty boy at the table. I remember nothing about the food except the hearty flavorful soups that started each Mittagessen. It must be the cool climate that made satisfying soups a heritage of Swiss women.

I wish I could say that Pfarrer Schlatter was a sterling representative of his profession and held in high esteem by his flock. He was not. His name sounds ploppy, his figure and overly full, smooth, pink-accented face matched his name and so did his intellect. The Herrliberger Protestants had no choice but to tolerate him; they could not fire him because it was the church hierarchy who assigned pastors. None of that mattered to me; I was allowed to share his table, unstintingly. In retrospect, particularly commendable, considering the overbearing selfrighteousness of some religious types, Pfarrer Schlatter not even once insinuated that his religion was better than mine, much less did he touch on the possibility of conversion. With all his public faults, he was a generous man of character in private.

The noon-time dilemma settled, I started school in Herrliberg in spring of 1941, whizzing on my bike all the way down on the paved road. I took this route when the meadows were green and the road was free of snow and ice. When the country was clad in white, then I retraced the old familiar gravel path along which I had come to know every bump and fruit tree, and then followed its extension from Wetzwil down into Herrliberg. Backpack hanging on my shoulders, ski poles on my gloved hands, and my mother's old skis on my boots, the race to school was sport. The reverse, the uphill drag after school wearied my legs, drained my stomach and bulged my bladder enough so I sometimes had to stop and yellow the pristine snow.

Not wanting to leave more signature than necessary, I always aimed for the dent made in the snow on first contact. Sort of like target shooting. One never knows what deeds pride inspires. Done, I rinsed my hands with pure white snow, rubbed them dry on my jacket, pulled my mittens back on and continued uphill, relieved.

The snow melt of spring brought a new challenge. We lived at 2100 feet above sea level, the school was at about 900 feet. When it snowed at the Kinderheim, rain sometimes had washed away the snow two-thirds of the way to school, or, in spring, when the sun warmed the slopes, the snow melted much sooner down in town than up on our ridge. With the countryside split between white and bare, I skied until the snow petered out and then took off my skis, slung them over my shoulder and carried them and the poles to school. On the way home, the order reversed. No pleasure, in either direction. To slide into the wooden seat of the desk at school in the morning was bliss as was relaxing on a chair at the Vonesch's kitchen table in the late afternoon, with a piece of rye and a glass of milk to re-energize my body and brain so I could tackle the daily dose of homework, after my chores were done.

The school building in Herrliberg is a fuzz inside my brain, but, the class room is almost clear, probably because it differed little from all the others in which I sat. A bank of windows to the left provided day light and the temptation for the eye and mind to wander outside over tree tops and up to the blue sky, or into whirling snow flakes or gray driving rain when boredom threatened inside. We, somewhere between 20 and 30 boys and girls, sat at wooden desks, the seats anatomically curved just enough so the the front edge would not cut into our thighs. The back of one desk was the front of the one behind, so our backs were in close proximity to our unseen neighbor. This closeness turned out to be important, but not for learning. The desk top was slanted and hinged so we could open it and stow in the space below whatever we did not need or wanted to hide from the teacher.

This was the age of ink in ink wells, filled by the teacher, on request, from an ink-encrusted little metal pitcher with a long spout, and of pens with nibs in holders. Ball points had not yet been invented and fountain pens were forbidden because they inhibited orthographic precision. Only pens with nibs allowed one to create letters with the proper flow and shading, heavy on the downstroke such as for the lower case cursive letter *el* and for the second downstroke on the cursive *a*. We were graded on orthography and my marks were not in the desirable range: My hand tended to move faster than the nib could do its tricks, or something like it. The whole business could be very frustrating. Often, just as I was in the flow of a word, a piece of invisible fiber, scratched from the fuzzy-surfaced war-time paper, would get stuck between the halves of the nib and drag a stray line next to the one intended. Even if nothing invisible interfered, too much ink on the nib, and a blob like a miniature bird dropping would deface the grayish-white lined paper as the pen touched the sheet; too little ink, and the letters were skinny and lacked character. With Swiss discipline, I did learn to write neatly, at school and for homework. But, the attendant frustration apparently accumulated under the surface of my conscious; then, when released from the pedagogues' restraint, my handwriting reverted to my natural inclination: fast and sloppy. It was the bane of my parents in my cards and letters, of relatives and friends who had and have to decipher my epistles, since writing personal letters by machine is gauche. Teachers and professors did get even: if they could not easily read what I wrote, they lowered my grade, no matter the merits of my words.

The ink well, sunk to the right into a narrow level portion near the front edge of the desk on the right, not only delivered ink, but also rascally delight. I do not remember if I was one of the culprits; if I was not, I felt I could not afford such naughty luxury. At least half of the sweet sex wore their hair in Heidi-style braids, blonde, brown and occasionally red or black. Those with black hair had nothing to worry about. Any other color spelled temptation. When all was quiet and everyone diligently working, a boy's hand would stealthily lift one of those enticing tails and dip it into the ink well, touch the ends to the always ready blotter to keep dress or blouse unstained, and then gently lower the braid, the girl no wiser. When the guy was too clumsy, a stricken screech: "Freulein Maier, Fritz is dipping my braid into the ink!!" Then the culprit had to dry it the best he could and stay late that day, with a ruler-induced red bulge across two or three fingers, a reminder to cease and desist. The next day, the girl's braids would be a bit shorter. Soon, memories of the dangers would fade and another boy would try to become a hero, even if not to most of the girls.

Less messy, but just as much fun or annoyance, depending on sex, and requiring some planning, was the string trick. A pocket knife and a twist of string inhabited the hollow of the desk or pants pockets of most boys. When the glint in the eye had to be converted to action, the clever and careful rascal unobtrusively made a loop and hid it under his workbook. When the time seemed propitious, he skillfully slid the loop around the fringy end of victim's braid, quickly tighened it and tied the other end of the string to the metal frame of the desk. Now the interminable wait. Finally, Freulein Maier, or whatever her name was, asked the girl a question. She, like all students who were called upon, had to rise and stand up before she answered. Anyway, she tried. As soon as the victim's knees were halfway straight, the string tightend and yanked on her braid; down plopped the girl, to laughter, except from the blushing girl. Punishment for this infraction was mostly verbal, may be because Freulein Maier could not help but smile when almost everyone laughed, possibly thinking back to the time when she had been teased by an admiring boy.

All this nonsense stopped the morning Herr Emil Walder strode into our room and took charge of our class. Tall, bald, chiseled features, deep-set eyes, imposing voice, a figure of authority. The day he replaced Freulein Maier turned out to be crucial to my life, that in school and out in the world.

Lehrer (teacher) Walder drilled our minds and our bodies; a sloppy body housed a lackadaisical mind. He insisted that we stand straight, not in a perfunctory slouch when we had to answer his questions in the subjects he taught, language and the social sciences. When he talked, we listened; when we wrote, he paced between the rows, not stealthily to catch us at some infraction, as some teachers did with sly satisfaction, but to encourage, to help when help was needed, to praise when praise was deserved. He taught, at last me, that learning could be a challenge, not just a chore. Lehrer Walder attempted to instilled in us the idea that the past is worth knowing, that the present must be known if we were to succeed and, in geography, that there was a world out there to appreciate and explore. He tried to teach us grammar, parsing of sentences, tenses and all the other unimportant-seeming minutiae of hanging words on a line. Why did we have to learn all that boring stuff? But, there was no escape, the rote eventually took root, even if not deep roots. He taught us boys that physical fitness liberates as it disciplines the body, just as learning liberates and disciplines the mind. We had no gym, no athletic installation of any kind that I remember and no gym clothes. During *turnen,* physical education, we boys not only had to stand in line erect, but army recruit erect, chin up, shoulders back before we trotted around the school yard, swung our arms around in calisthenics or tossed medicine balls to each other. That clumsy ball kept embarrassing me. Five or six of us stood facing each other in a circle so we could toss the ball back and forth, fast and at random. The ball was heavy and big; I was slow and awkward and dropped the ball more than most of the other boys. I thoroughly disliked that medicine.

What did the girls do for phys ed? I have no idea. Somehow, the girls just didn't register for me, other than as bearers of braids to be dipped into ink or tied to desks.

Yes, Lehrer Walder made us work and work hard, he wanted us to learn, to know, to think; he made learning irresistible. What luck to have him as a teacher! Chance had turned out well, again.

The deep snow of winter brought with it the annual school ski competition on a hilly meadow, now clothed in white, between Herrliberg and Wetzwil. The run wasn't very steep or very long, but challenging enough to separate the skilled from those wobbly or chicken on their skis. Someone even had built a modest ski jump by piling up snow and shaping it for a smooth transition from hill to take-off. Lehrer Walder and some local ski aces graded our form in snow-plowing down the steepest incline, on our expertise with turns at full speed, on how fast we zipped down the hill, on the time we needed to climb up with skis in the V position, and, of course, the distance we soared from take-off to landing and on the grace with which we flew and touched down. I was very consistent in my performance in all disciplines, but the jump. That is where I really stood out, in last place. My heart beat fast, I crouched down and pushed off down the slope, hoping I wouldn't go too fast and fall down before the jump. I reached the jump, I flew off the end, may be ten feet at most, and landed safely. What a relief! Laughter and applause greeted me, the kind that reddens cheeks and makes foreheads sweat in cold air. Ridicule or not, the main point was that I had made it without breaking a leg.

True, I was a bit chicken about jumping; I was neither natural athlete nor daredevil. What if I broke a leg? Not just the pain, that I could imagine, but who would pay for fixing my broken leg? What would Aunt Jenny say? How would I tell my parents, or would I tell them at all, so they would not worry about me? All these questions crowded my head as I mosied up sideways to the top of the hill. I could not ignore them; they scraped like sand on the bottom of skis. They made me realize that I was not like the rest of my schoolmates, that I could not just go home to my parents for help and comfort. Ultimately, I depended on the kindness of strangers.

....

> .....Thank to God, Werner is fine, but, every now and then we suffer from homesickness for him. That was particularly true on his birthday and especially affected Jakob. .....
>
> (Letter, my mother to the Heilbronners, 9 February, 1941)
>
> Now we have to see what fate has in store for us. Jakob does not let his courage waver, he is a born optimist and has succeeded where others had given up. Even then, with Werner's [emigration] to Switzerland; he undoubtedly was the last immigrant who got in.
>
> (My mother, letter to the Heilbronners in Detroit, 11 May 1941)

....

Once, just once, Lehrer Walder's wrath pierced my very being; it was as if Mars himself had hurled his sword at my guts. His thrust hit during a test when I was catching my breath after a struggle over some answers, before I tackled the next set of questions. My eyes must have wandered about instead of being fixed on the paper in front of me. Mr. Walder thought I was trying to spy an answer on my neighbor's paper, to cheat. "*Ich dachte Du bist ein ehrlicher Bub*!" - I thought you were an honest boy, he thundered. The class sat rigid, holding its collective breath. This was an explosion without precedent. I was horrified. Lehrer Walder, my favorite teacher of all time, the mental embodiment of my father, had accused me of trying to cheat. I was crushed. My cheeks burned, my heart raced as I told him wavering-voiced that I had not tried to cheat, that I just was resting between answers. He believed me; he wanted to believe me, because, somehow, I had become his favorite student. No, he did not pamper me; he simply expected the best I could give. When I offered a bright answer, satisfaction informed his eyes; when I gave a partial answer, he questioned and pulled until the answer was complete; when I flubbed, the shadow under his big brows deepened. He wanted me to succeed.

When Herr Walder had calmed down, he lectured us about honesty, the absolute need for it if we were to respect ourselves and expected trust from others; that the cheater made himself the victim of his dishonesty; that to fail honestly was honorable, to succeed dishonestly, a disgrace. The intensity, the urgency of his words, yes, his pleading for honesty, has rung in my ears ever since.

Daily, or every other day, we were subjected to singing lessons. I enjoyed singing to myself out of doors, when mis-tones and missed notes were irrelevant, when a song without words, because I did not remember them, did not dampen my volume or satisfaction. But, I hated singing in school, in front of others, all by myself, being judged by the lady teacher to whom a wrong note was a personal insult. The lovely voices of some of the girls were a delight to hear; why did I have to spoil it for everyone, including myself? I did not flunk singing only because I at least tried to produce a recognizable sound, and, maybe because I amused the teacher by playing the ham. For Brahm's lullaby, I closed my eyes and rested my head on my folded arms; for a marching song, I swung my arms; for a patriotic song, I enthusiastically mouthed the words. Once I had thought of that diversion, singing lessons no longer annoyed me.

I got along well with my classmates, but friends I had none. I had no time to make friends. After the long trek down from Rütibühl, little time remained before class started. At noon, I hurried to Pfarrer and Frau Schlatter's manse next to the church, for the mid-day meal. At the end of the day, I could not linger and chat, much less visit any potential friend's house to talk or play; I had to tackle the long hill toward chores and homework. I did not miss friends. I was too busy with what I had to do and in my free hours I liked to wander in the woods, felt compelled to read the *Neue Zürcherzeitung* to find out about the latest Nazi army victories and to guess the acuteness of the danger of an invasion, to tend my stamp collection or just to catch up on sleep. And, I also had to my parents and grandmother, occasionally even to Aunt Berta and Uncle Max in Munich, in reply to a card or letter from them, never on my own initiative. I eagerly received mail, but the reverse was a real chore. No, lack of friends was not a problem.

An inanimate pair of friends, my skis, had become a problem, a major source of consternation. They were old; they had been my mother's and looked tired. Once, when I fell in a way that one can fall only on skis, legs, skis and poles scrambled - there were no self-release bindings that long ago - a few inches of tip of the right ski snapped off. What now? Mr. Vonesch came to the rescue. He fashioned a bandage out of sheet metal and some screws and off to the slope I was again the next day. A few weeks later, after the school ski competition in Herrliberg, disaster struck. I was glorying in some fresh powder snow that had arrived during the night and schussing down a hill on my way to school. I saw the bump and dip, but too late. My skis spun out of control; I flipped and ended on my back, the tips of the skis just above and beyond my head, a position only an acrobat would voluntarily assume. I collected my wits; nothing hurt. I reached up to my bindings, loosened them and dumped the skis. With them off my boots, I scrambled to my feet, shook the snow off my face and the rest of me and - Oh, no! - the whole tip section of the left ski was lying in the snow. The ski now was just a narrow, straight board with a slightly upturned jagged front end. No way could I ski on. I tucked the broken tip into my backpack, hoped that Mr. Vonesch again could work a miracle, shouldered the skis and poles and trudged through the beautiful snow, now a hindrance. I arrived late; the broken tip was all the evidence I needed. Back home, I showed the wounded ski to Mr. Vonesch as soon as he opened the door that evening. No miracle. It was not fixable. No more skiing to school or for fun the rest of that winter. New skis? No way. I would not even have thought of asking Aunt Jenny or the Bollags of Zurich for another pair, any pair, in so many words. I just told them what happened. Sympathy, yes, but I could not ski on words. As it turned out, that deep winter day in 1942 was the last time I ever skied.

....

> With the cold weather we have been having, the ink could freeze. Here it was down to -32 Celsius. How do you get to school with all that snow and cold? Possibly via skis?
>
> (My father, in a postcard to me, 27 January, 1942)
>
> What's the matter with you, we have had no news from you since your letter dated 7 January. Are you possibly snowed in or were you sick? I assume that something is on its way, but you can imagine that we worry when we get no mail for about a month. Fix it so that you write to us at least every 10 days to 2 weeks; that will satisfy us. I have been at home since 5 days because I got frostbite on my toes. I have to bathe them and wait until the skin that was cut off has regrown. That will take some more days. Here, it continues to snow; it's rare that we have such masses of snow. Write immediately and fond regards and kisses fom your
>
> Vati
>
> (Postcard, 6 February, 1942)

....

It was the winter when the arrogant ditty from the north *"Die Schweiz, das kleine Stachelschwein, die nehmen wir im Rückzug ein"* - We'll capture Switzerland, that little porcupine, even in retreat - seemed just a bit less threatening; Soviet soldiers and Russian weather had succeeded in arresting the Nazi onslaught.

In spite of Lehrer Walder and my efforts, it was not my best year in school. My grades did not live up to my parents' and relatives' expectations. I suppose, I was just too tired from down the long hill in the early morning and up the same long hill in the afternoon. Home, a greeting from Mauser, a greeting for and snack from Mrs. Vonesch; a chore or two; dinner, homework, bed. Still, I didn't feel burdened. I was satisfied.

Uprooted, again

Then one day, late in February of 1942, Aunt Jenny snapped open a void under me. My heart dumped into my guts. My brain raced. It could not be: She and the Bollags had decided that I was to move, to move away from the Voneschs, away from Rütibühl, away from my school in Herrliberg, away from Lehrer Walder. How could they, Aunt Jenny and the Bollags, do that to me? I protested, as vigorously as I dared, that I liked the Voneschs, that I liked school in Herrliberg, that I was just fine where I was, that I had to move already once, far away from my parents, why move again when there was no need for it? Aunt Jenny patiently listened; then, in her low-key authoritarian voice, she explained that I had to spend too much time on my trek from home to school and back again, that my learning suffered because of the strain and that what I learned, in and out of school, was the only possession no one could take from me. Aunt Jenny had subtly dressed up one of her concerns: "... learned ... out of school". She neither said that the Voneschs were too countrified and uncultured nor that I would end up the same way if I stayed with them, but I got the message: She wanted me to live among people whose language and manners met certain standards, hers. If I was to get on in the world, social graces were important, the kind of behavior I had learned at home, with my parents, and that, in her view, had been diluted during my nearly two and a half years high above the lake, beside meadows and forests; among the Voneschs with their rabbits and excessive chores for me, their non-genteel language and their lack of middle class education, all blemishes that might cling to me. I was oblivious to all these supposed hazards on the road to my future and perfectly happy where I was.

I was to move, early in April.

I spilled the news to the Voneschs as soon as I rushed in the door, but it was old news to them. They had been told and told not to tell me; I was to get the news firsthand from Aunt Jenny. Now, the Voneschs were able to lower their guard. They were disappointed, even mildly insulted. Had I complained? No way, I assured them. Apparently, the reasons given for my departure were not as veiled as the giver, whoever it was, had thought. The idea that the Voneschs were no longer good enough to take care of me seemed to have seeped through the message and, very understandably, was not appreciated. The fact that the income derived from me would also be leaving - I suppose there was some profit in me, in spite of my big appetite - and that the chores I did, mostly cheerfully, would revert to the family, also may have colored their view.

This was February and there still was time to appeal to my parents for help. Rarely had my thoughts turned into legible words so quickly. Time was of the essence if I had any chance of rescuing myself. I wrote a long letter explaining why I should stay where I was and bemoaned my impending fate. I begged my mother and father to intervene with Aunt Jenny and the Bollags to keep me where I was, with the Voneschs, out in the country on top of the hill. They did, but to no avail. They were as surprised at the decision as I had been. Reluctantly, they accepted the decree, trusting that our relatives, theirs and mine, those close to the scene, could judge better what was best for me than they, helpless in the prison without bars that was Nazi Mindelheim.

....

> We hear that Werner is to move and he wrote very unhappily about it, because he likes it so much in Herrliberg and can not understand that he has to leave everything that he has learned to love. What is there to do? Please, do me the favor and discuss it with your mother [Aunt Jenny] right away. I know that all of you want the best for him, but if he is so unhappy about the move, then it serves no purpose. We can not make a judgment from here. On the other hand, it would be better if he were closer to school.
>
> (My mother, in a postcard to the Adlers, 8 March 1942)

....

Even from where mortal danger crept ever closer, wisdom shines from my father's lines

> "... one must look farther into the future. It never hurts to get to know different surroundings; that undoubtedly will be an advantage in your future."

And, my mother set my predicament into perspective, a perspective whose full meaning I could not even imagine:

> " Aunt Jenny ... wants only the best for you... Be brave and strong and believe that this

is a minor matter compared to the fate of others."

(From a letter, 8 March, 1942)

Enclosed with that letter was a poem my father had written in July 1941, almost a year earlier, a poem that inspired me, a poem born of desperation and concern for my future, a poem that even in translation still shreds the heart.

Work is wonderful, when freedom her allotted
But, I insist, that when both are absent, you are out of luck - here and
over there.

Now, high the head, your courage shall not sink
If work you want and liberty you have, find it you will.

With diligence and loyalty almost anything can be achieved
With a little luck much can be accomplished
But the latter cannot be forced
The path is rough and not very easy.

Don't be scared of many tasks
Today, much still is strange to you
A strong will & good health, may it be granted you by God.

You have been torn from us for more than 2 years,
You live in Switzerland, well provided.
You can imagine that we miss you;
You are so near and still so far.

I do not know whether we will succeed
To meet with you again.
If not, then travel tranquilly alone
And travel without fear.

The uncles and the aunts already are informed
And should you there arrive
You immediately will find a home.

Hold up your head and open your eyes
Something certainly will turn up.
A strong will - luck - and a straight path
Will overcome everything. (Middle of July 1941)

Those goddamn Nazi bastards, that's all I can say right now, this afternoon, at three o'clock, on the twentieth of August, 1999.

In spite of their travails, a frost-bitten toe for my father while laboring in a forest in the arctic and bitter winter of 1941/42 plus a forced move to a tiny apartment split between two floors, my parents reminded me to thank Pfarrer Schlatter for his and his wife's kindness in sharing their Mitagessen with me for months.

……………………

> We also will write right away to Pastor Schlatter and thank him. We knew neither a name nor an address and with the passing of events we didn't think about that, which we regret but will take care of. We had thought all the time that we would soon be able to thank all relatives and acquaintances personally for all the love and sacrifices, but fate did not want it.
>
> (My mother, in a letter to Aunts Jenny and Cilli, jointly. 7 March 1942)

……………………

Time started to converge toward the day when I had to leave the Voneschs.
I packed my belongings, the clothes I still could wear, handkerchiefs, towels, wash cloths and blankets, bedding and my horse hair pillow, and whatever else my mother had so carefully and tightly packed into my two large trunks. Two and a half years ago it was a trousseau of hope for her and my father; now, hope had nearly been drained. Less than a year ago, in that poem, my father had written

> "... I do not know whether we will succeed / To meet with you again...

He had intended to send it to me sooner, but had misplaced it. May be that was just as well. Now, in late winter of 1942, these lines, so freighted with the load my parents were carrying and portending the future, were intermingled, if not lost, among my immediate concerns about my move to an unknown, worrisome destination. The hardly veiled message that I never again might see my parents, my father and mother, did not register. It was a message I did not want to hear, a threat that I disregarded, consciously or not, because the edict to move, the upheaval about to be realized, was all I could cope with as a thirteen year old. The potential menace of losing my parents was too remote, too unlikely, yes, impermissible.

When my parents had written to others, the words were unvarnished, already a year earlier:

> Now .... that the [American consul in Stuttgart] also demands this [a trust fund of thousands of dollars] we sit here in our desperation and don't know what we can or should do. ...
>
> (My father, letter to Annelies and Fred Salfield (?) in New York, 25 February, 1941)

On April third 1942, a Friday, there was no rain and the sun may have been shining. I was glad for the first, but sun or no, it was a day the most radiant sun could not have brightened as I kissed Mrs. Vonesch and Lucy good bye, shook the hand of Mr. Vonesch and hugged Mauser, my trusted friend, one last time.

I turned around, away from those who had been my caretakers for these past two and one half years, to hide my tears, mounted my bicycle and steered toward my future in Mænnedorf, looking back just once to answer their waving hands with a wave of my left hand while I steered with my right.

……

> Mrs. Vonesch wrote a long letter. She must really be very nice.
>
> (My mother, to Aunt Jenny, 23 March, 1941)
>
> I thank Mrs. Vonesch and family and the relatives very much for the presents [you received]. I hope that you thanked them yourself. When I have time, I will write to all of them. Did Mrs. Vonesch receive my New Year's letter?
>
> (My mother, in a postcard, 18 January, 1942)

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I do not know how long the Voneschs lived or anything further about them, only that Lucie became a nurse and eventually settled in Cincinnati, Ohio.

At the Voneschs I had been apprenticed to a life without parents; they had helped shape my life, for the better. What would Mænnedorf bring?

Mænnedorf

Wheeling into my future

I knew Mænnedorf hugged Lake Zurich a few towns east of Herrliberg and also the names Kinderheim Hebron, Herr Spoerry, and the general location of my home-to-be: about half way between the edge of the forest that capped the Pfannenstiel and the lake. No need for a street address, everyone in town would know where this Kinderheim is, I was told. Finding the place would be no problem, but would I find it to my liking, a place where I again could feel at home, though far from home? Aunt Jenny and the Bollags had assured me: "You will like it", whatever "it" might be; it is a sentence thrown over children like a net from which there is no escape. It's not a neutral statement, a reasonable expectation, but a command and warning: "You WILL like it" followed by the unspoken but clearly heard words "You might just as well, because that is our decision." No one had told me why I had to move before the fiat was issued; no one likely even considered the possibility that the upheaval would have been eased had someone answered the why? before Aunt Jenny confronted me, kindly but firmly, with the edict on that bleak February day. My wishes and feelings obviously were irrelevant. I had to assume that these strangers, my relatives, had been kind.

In a card to my parents on 30 March, 1942, my last one from Rütibühl, I had told them: "Supposedly it's also nice there." I was far from convinced.

I still was far from convinced four days later as I pedalled eastward along country roads, past farm houses and barns, past still bare orchards and vineyards, and generally downhill. By the time I was was out of sight of the big house on the hill at the edge of the woods, my home ever since I had crossed Lake Constance to safety without my parents, the breeze had evaporated the last of my tears and my eyes caught the first green blades poking through the tan winter mat of dead grass. Here and there little spring flowers heralded the end of winter on this sun-facing slope above Lake Zurich.

I was not to see that house again until 55 years later, when Joan and I made a pilgrimage to Rütibühl, accompanied by Doris, the daughter of the Bollags of Lausanne, and her husband. Would the house still stand or had the decades or fire consumed it?

As we near the area where memory told me the Kinderheim should be, we see a modest but neat sign: *Heim Rütibühl.* So, it is still here, just the *Kinder* is missing in the name. My legs accelerate, my heart beats faster; I leave the others behind as I hurry toward my past. Instead of meadows along the road, green fields of wheat flow on both sides and the rugged trees whose shadows had accompanied and startled me when I fetched the milk those decades ago are gone. But there, in the near distance, backed by my woodland of long ago, rises the house, even larger than before, though changed, still there. Where I had toiled in the vegetable garden, beach umbrellas brighten the scene. Young women are laughing, splashing in the a large whirlpool or sitting on garden chairs and benches. A youngish women, curiosity in her eyes, brown-haired and round of face, opens a window on the ground floor of the house as I stand there, staring at the windowed wall, my mind in the 1940s. "*Guete Nachmittag.*" - Good afternoon, she says. I come to and explain who I am and why I am here. Now her eyes widen in amazement at this apparition from the past, decades before she had been born. She excuses herself and, in a minute or two, is back with the director, Freulein Ziegler, in tow. They hardly can believe my story and are delighted I have come. They know nothing of the long ago past, of the Voneschs, or of the Kinderheim, now transformed into a home for mentally retarded young women. Miss Ziegler, tall, slim, gray-haired with still a few strands of black, invites us to linger for tea, but the day is getting long and we have to return to Zurich to ready ourselves for our long flights home the next morning. I briefly relate the history of the Kinderheim and my place in it before we bid each other goodbye. My mind is in another world, one long gone. I clasp Joan's proffered right hand and let my glasses catch my tears as we return to Doris' and her husband's car. A circle has been closed.

When my hair was black and thick, I had cycled to the east of my school in Wetzwil, within sight of the Strasser girl's and her mother's cottage, then above the lakeside towns of Meilen and Uetikon. I leisurely pedalled and let gravity help me forward. I was in no hurry to meet my future, but neither did I want to diddle along, because I was expected to arrive in time for Mittagessen. The load of separation had eased during my ride through the quiet countryside, as if dispersed by the air through which I passed. When I knew I was near the uphill edge of Mænnedorf, I stopped at a farm house for directions to the Kinderheim Hebron.

I passed an inn, rounded a curve, turned left onto a narrow level road of packed fine gravel and there it stood: *Privat Kinderheim*, Privat centered above Kinderheim, in black letters above the double door of translucent yellowish-red sheets of glass set into white wood moldings over white-painted wood panels. The entrance was protected by a small gabled portico supported by square wooden columns. A picket fence about four feet high with dense shrubbery behind it lent the large house, faced with stucco painted a pale yellow, a fairy tale atmosphere, not entirely benign, but not forbidding either, just a bit mysterious. "So, this is it." I stood there, taking it in, this house set among other large houses instead of reigning in grand solitude on top of a hill, out in the country, where I had been just two hours earlier. I was apprehensive.

My darkened imagination turned into alarm when, as soon as I had pressed down on the latch of the gate, ferocious barking penetrated the walls. I stopped, outside the gate. Seconds later, the front door opened, but no monster dog came to attack me, but a women in her late thirties or early forties, about my mother's age, approached me in greeting. Her smile, set between pulled-back brown hair, parted down the middle, melted my inner chill and her outstretched hands echoed her "*Willkomme,* Werner!" It was Freulein Erica Spoerry, the owners' daughter, a women who was to profoundly influence my life.

As I steered my bike inside the fence and leaned it on a shrub, Herr and Frau Spoerry emerged to greet me. My eyes first fixed on her, tiny, at least as short as my mother, and thinner. Her deep-set dark eyes appeared to be covered with a gauze of sadness or, maybe, weariness. Her severely pulled-back, still mostly black hair parted in the middle, spoke of a no-fuss person and her sinewy hands of hard work. I responded to her soft "*Grüetzi*" in a tone I would have used for my grandmother, deferential. The contrast between Mrs. Spoerry and her husband spoke loudly. She seemed wrapped in a veil of timidity; he exuded self confidence and power, at least the power to silence the unseen guardian with a firm "*Neger*!". The smile that accompanied his "*Willkomme*" behind rimless glasses seemed born of politeness, not feeling. The grip of his proffered right hand surprised mine with a force that almost hurt. His hair style would be mod right now, at the turn of the millennium. A cushion of brown and grey, combed straight back above his high forehead, rode above an almost shaved band between one temple and the other. Mr. Spoerry's chin was softend by a mostly gray goatee and a tuft of gray hair between the beard and the lower lip, but the entire hirsute effort lacked the distinguished aura that had radiated from the carefully tended pure white hair and beard my grandfather Samuel had worn with evident pride.

Miss Spoerry's clothes left no impression. Black was the color for the seniors, long black skirt and dark blouse for Mrs. Spoerry and black pants and a black vest over a white shirt for him.

Mr. Spoerry turned and left us talking. A minute or two later he reappeared, this time with the source of that resounding bark, restrained on a short leash attached to a choke chain. It was Neger, a glistening black retriever of formidable size. I stood as still as my nervous heartbeat would permit and let him sniff my pants and hands. Maybe it was the scent of Mauser that had attached itself to me as I took leave of her earlier that day that caused Neger's tail to wave in presumed approval. *"Sitz!"* from his master, and sit he did. *"Hand!"* I took the raised paw with trepidation, but no harm befell me. We had been properly introduced, Neger and I. We never became friends, just friendly. In time I came to feel sorry for him. He had no happy hunting ground for field mice or a spacious garage as a hangout, as Mauser had. Neger lived in the basement, which I thought was a disgusting way to treat a dog, down there in permanent dusk, except when Mr. Vonesch opened the door to leash him for a daily walk or a short unrestrained romp in the garden when no one else was out there. Sometimes, when Mr. Spoerry was out of the house, I opened the door to the netherworld, cautiously, so Neger would not rush out, and then petted his silken-shiny muscular rump for a few minutes. I never would have dared to take him for a walk; there was no way I could have controlled him, choke collar or not. Neger was not a household pet; he was not even Mr. Spoerry's pet; he was his symbol of power and unquestioning subservience.

With the welcomes at an end, we passed through a small entry, the kind common in cold climates to stem wintry blasts. From there, I was guided through a door half wood half glass. The translucent glass of the upper half was almost identical in color and texture to that of the entrance to our flat in Mindelheim. A black on white enameled sign mounted on the door frame declared: *Besuchszeit/Nachmittags 2-5 Uhr/ Samstag keine*; below it, a separate, smaller, plate demanded: *Alle Türen leise zu schliessen.* This announcement, "Visiting hours/Afternoons 2-5 o'clock/ None Saturdays" and the admonition to close all doors quietly still greeted me when I stepped into the vestibule for the last time, almost four decades later, on a visit to Ms. Spoerry, several years after the last children had been absorbed by history.

This distantly familiar door led into a large plank-floored vestibule from which radiated the halls. Toward the right ascended a broad uncarpeted staircase bordered by shiny three-fourths rounded railings on turned supports. It looked grand; I was impressed. The older Spoerrys took their leave to attend to whatever required their attention and Miss Spoerry led the way up the stairway, opened a glassed door with wings that separated the second floor from downstairs, then turned right and led me past another glassed door, up a narrower set of stairs, to the small third-floor landing that opened onto three doors, one to the right, one to the left, and one straight ahead. Miss Spoerry opened this middle door, the one that led to my room-to-be. Its size astonished me.

Had I been a six-footer with arms to match, I would have been able to nearly touch both side walls while standing in the middle of the room. The light blue tongue-in-groove walls were no more than five feet high before they angled inward and upward, without converging, to allow for a narrow horizontal ceiling. A bed along the east side nearly filled the length between the south wall and the curtained-off closet along the north wall. A bookshelf or two lined most of the west wall; an arm chair, only its seat upholstered, filled the right front corner, next to the window.

Miss Spoerry urged me forward to the dormer window. What a vista! Below me, beyond the backyard and a paved road, a still wintry-bare orchard descended the hill. I could tell by the shiny bark that, come summer, cherries would hang from the branches. Further on lay the town of Mænnedorf, punctuated by two prominent exclamation marks, the spires of the Catholic and Protestant churches. The lake, the same Zürichersee I had admired from high on our hill in Rütibühl, glistened in the near distance. Across the lake, I could see individual houses and buildings in the town of Wædenswil; rising above it stretched the forested moraine that borders the lake on the south, the twin of ours. A sky-clearing Fœhn breeze had sprung up and transformed the air into a magnifying lens that pulled near the pristine arc of the Swiss Alps, a magnificent encounter of white earth and blue sky.

What a gorgeous panorama! It was a view that neither Aunt Jenny nor the Bollags could savor from any of their windows. I kept my eyes on the scenery until Miss Spoerry reminded me that Mittagessen was ready. released from my reverie, I noticed the void in my stomach and I gladly followed her down into the dining room.

Until now, I had been completely oblivious to any other youngsters who might have shared Kinderheim Hebron with me. At the Kinderheim Rütibühl I had been the only boarder for over two years.

As I looked at the four children already at the large, massive dining table, I saw no prospect of a playmate or friend. All were years younger than I, including a toddler, a boy, in a highchair. This little guy with a round face and silky brown hair had the deepest, most beautiful brown eyes I ever had seen. He was Miss Spoerry's nephew, her sister Leni's little son. He was a lovely child. Miss Spoerry introduced the children and me to each other. Then she and her father also sat down at the table and Mrs. Spoerry, the chief and only cook, and Mrs. Staiger-Lohr, the household helper, carried in and joined us for our Mittagessen. Strangely, I remember almost nothing about the food in Maennedorf, the food I ate day after day, for over four years. It must have been ample. I never craved more after almost every meal and had no need, desire or opportunity, even if I had the wish, to horn in on the dog's portions, as I had with the Voneschs. Mr. Spoerry himself fed Neger; his food, including table scraps, was not in the least enticing.

The only meals I recall were Sunday suppers, at about five. My mind still sees and I almost can savor the marble cake, extracted from a large fluted cake pan with a hole in the middle, and a mug of steaming hot cocoa poured from a potbellied pitcher. Not only was the cake, still one of my favorites, a pleasure on the palate, but the ever-changing convolutions of the deep brown chocolate pattern amidst the yellow matrix, as piece after piece was cut, let our imaginations roam trying to find recognizable patterns among the random twirls. We, adults and kids, saw clouds, a question mark, a dog's snout or goat's head with horns. What one saw others didn't; it was a competition without winners or losers. When the cocoa had cooled enough for slurping, it was time to decimate our generous servings of cake. Some of us bit straight in, others, like I, carefully circumbit the deep brown portion, saving it till last to absorb the full rich chocolaty flavor undiluted by plain buttery yellow cake. I suppose much of the monthly ration of eggs surfaced in that enticing cake. With only one or two eggs per person per week during the war-time shortage, even in peaceful Switzerland, a pure play in eggs on the plate was rare. They needed to be stretched by enriching other dishes.

I suppose my memory of food in Mænnedorf is meager because the kitchen was a domain separate from the rest of the house. It was large, with two doors, one from a hall to admit proviander and the other one, a swinging door, to ferry food from kitchen to table and dirty dishes in reverse. We children were not allowed in the kitchen. It was not like at home, where one mostly well-behaved kid could be watched, or at the Voneschs, where the kitchen doubled as social center.

After Mittagessen that first day, the youngest children were relegated to their rooms to take naps, the two middle aged ones played on the swings backyard, and I double-stepped up the flights of stairs to the landing where I unlocked my trunks that somehow had arrived and transferred my clothes and other goods to shelves to the right and left of the door. I also had to dress my bed: a linen sheet on the bottom, tucked in all around, one on top tucked in just at the foot end, a blanket, the horse hair pillow for my head and then the white-shrouded feather-bed to finish the job. Occasionally, I refreshed my spirits from the boring task of unpacking by leaning on the window sill to take in the scenery.

Afternoons quickly pass into evening in early April. After the young children were tucked into bed by Miss Spoerry, the family invited me up to their sitting room, which was centered directly below my room, but much larger, to tell them about myself and my family. They only knew the basics, by way of the Kinderhilfe, so they listened intently as I roughed in these past two and one half years. After good nights all around, I headed for my room, changed to my pajamas, found my way to the bathroom on the floor below, and then up again, to my bed. I covered myself up to my neck with my wool blanket and featherbed to keep the April chill out and rested my head on the pillow, eyes open. This day, Friday, the third of April, 1942, had turned out to be a good day. My doubts, yes fears, about the move already had become faint by the time I fell asleep.

Settling in

At breakfast the next morning, a Saturday, Miss Spoerry invited me to call her Tante Erica, Aunt Erica; Mr. Spoerry, Papa Spoerry and Mrs. Spoerry, Mama Spoerry, as generations of their charges had done before me. I gladly erased the formal titles that might have been attached to any stranger. The symbols of relatedness, Tante, Papa, Mama, helped transform these strangers into a quasi family, an aunt and a set of grandparents. No, not parents; they were too old for that and, besides, I had a wonderful set of parents who were part of me and I was part of them; we were indivisible, though distant.

What I can't figure out now, 60 years later, is why I did not sit down that Saturday morning, or even Sunday, and write to them, to tell them that I had arrived safely, that the Spoerrys were nice people and that I already liked it, after just one day. No, I waited until the eighth, five days after I had settled in, to write a card, not a letter, to my parents. I did this in spite of their admonitions, just two months earlier, after I had neglected
to write for a whole month.

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> Lieber Werner! Mindelheim 6 Febr. 42
>
> What's the matter with you, we have had no news from you since your letter dated 7 January. Are you possibly snowed in or were you sick? I assume that something is on its way, but you can imagine that we worry when we get no mail for about a month. Fix it so that you write to us at least every 10 days to 2 weeks; that will satisfy us. I have been at home since 5 days because I got frostbite on my toes. I have to bathe them and wait until the skin that was cut off has regrown. That will take some more days. Here, it continues to snow; it's rare that we have such masses of snow. Write immediately and fond regards and kisses fom your
>
> Vati
>
> My dear Werner!
>
> You can imagine how we worry because we have not heard from you in such a long time. You likely have snow vacation and nobody can get to the post office, but we nevertheless are worried. With us, everything has remained the same. Fondest regards and kisses from your
>
> Mutti
>
> (Postcard)

Dear Werner!

This time you really really stretched us out on the torture [instrument] and let us wait a long time for news. We were very worried about you since we read much in the newspaper about avalanches and other snow-related accidents and I thought nothing but that you were in some accident. Why didn't you write between 10 Jan and 2 Feb? After all, you did receive [prepaid] response cards. That must not happen again, or we will not write either for for a while so that you can see how that is. Mail from you is the only pleasure we can have with you. Do you understand that?

(My mother, in a letter, 10 February, 1942)

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On Sunday, right after breakfast, Papa Spoerry showed off his backyard. Most of the trees and shrubbery still were leafless this early April day and the downslope spread looked neither invitingly wild nor attractively formal; a white gazebo and benches in the right-hand corner did promise inviting leisure on sunny days, and swings and teeter-totters waited for the younger set. My eyes did catch a skeleton of bare branches clinging to a wooden trellis on the south wall of the house and I wondered aloud whether these wooden snakes were alive or dead. Papa Spoerry proudly told me that they decidely were alive, that leaves would be sprouting out of this network in a few weeks, leaves of an apricot tree no less. I hardly could believe it. Apricots, a rare and costly fruit I hardly knew, this far north, where winters sometimes froze over Lake Zurich. Amazing. He explained that the espaliered tree survived because the southern wall absorbed heat on sunny days and then radiated it outward the ensuing clear and cold nights, keeping the apricot branches and buds safe from death by freezing. The whole house protected the clinging web from icy north winds. The western wall supported a trellised pear, a tree more tolerant of freezes than an apricot. Papa Spoerry's prideful explanations told me that he appreciated my wide-eyed interest. Later in spring, when the sun stood higher in the sky and the air was mild, a shower of pink blossoms graced the south wall and the west wall wore splashes of white. It was here, in Papa Spoerry's backyard, that I accidentally absorbed my first lesson in microclimatology, a fascinating subject I then resurrected during my research career.

All the while, during this horticultural tour, Neger raced back and forth, testing his muscles before he again would have to descend into the dimness of his underworld. I noticed with quiet satisfaction the lack of a vegetable garden I would have to hoe and enrich with the brew of a septic tank, as I had been obliged to do at the Kinderheim Rütibühl. Things were looking up.

The tour over, I hopped on my bike and set out to explore my new town, a place much more spacious than the medieval cluster that was central Mindelheim, my boyhood playground, but without the allure and mysteries of the meadows and forests of Rütibühl. Mænnedorf was neither distinctive nor distinguished, just a nice town where getting lost would have been difficult. The church spires marked the center, the lake the southern edge and between the shore, and parallel to it, no more than a half mile from the water, the rail line stretched eastward to Rapperswil, about 20 minutes distant, and to Zurich, a half hour or a bit more westward. I judged that my feet could carry me to the train station in less than 20 minutes and to school in less than fifteen. Yes, things were looking up. South of the tracks and a bit east of the railroad station, the locally renowned *Hotel Wilder Man* fronted on the east-west road. On the downhill ride, I hadn't paid much attention to my right or left, but as I pushed my bike up the wide finely gravelled path, past my future school, I passed by mostly non-descript houses that lined the east side. Just one caught my attention. It was a white clapboard house with a tower-like structure that nudged the path. A door faced south. Through the windows of this slender vertical appendage a stairway wound its way to the second and third stories, a clever way to keep wind, snow and driving rain from blasting the entry doors on each floor.

To my left, a vineyard and orchards, apple and pear, covered the hillside and an ancient-looking farm house and barn, just like those clustered about milk central in Rütibühl, made me feel at home with its solidity, window boxes and neatly stacked manure pile. After a turn to the right, across the curvy paved road that connected the top and bottom of the town, I was back at my new home, in plenty of time for Mittagessen.

Having been forced closer to civilization no longer seemed burdensome.

The rest of Sunday was just Sunday, relaxing, talking, getting to know everyone better. The Spoerrys did not attend church. Papa Spoerry was his own and the family's minister.

Tante Erica's little nephew, Maxeli, little Max, and I took to each other right away. After just two days he trusted me enough to sit on my lap to play "Hoppe, hoppe Reiter." I held him around the waist, his face forward, and bounced him on my knees to the ditty

Hoppe, hoppe Reiter
Wenn er fællt dann schreit er
Fællt er in den Graben
Dann fressen in die Raben

Hop along, hop along rider
When he falls he will cry
If he falls in the ditch
The crows will come and eat him.

With the word Raben, a big bounce, my knees parted and the little guy dumped between my thighs, but not quite to the floor, because I held him under his arms. A scared yelp the first time, a big breath the second time and a delighted squeal by the third round. "*Mehr!*" from then on, until my legs tired. We were having as much fun as my father and I had had when I was a little tike, and as much as I had with our own children and grandchildren, being bounced or bouncer.

I also sat down and wrote a letter to the Voneschs to thank them for the good care they had given me and all they had taught me during the two and a half years in their midst. I had dreaded to write this letter because I feared that thinking about my second lost home might upset me, once more inflate my resentment against the move and movers. Surprisingly, the words came as easily, that is, no harder, than usual when I had to write. By the last line I might have said, but did not, "I already like it here, the people and the place." I would not have wanted to hurt the Voneschs' feelings.

Later that Sunday afternoon, Tante Erica introduced me to our neighbors in the imposing vine-covered house to the east. It was another Kinderheim, this one for mentally retarded children. A tall, slim, gray-haired lady, Freulein Otto, opened the door and welcomed us into the spacious well-appointed private sitting room. We hardly had sat down when what might have been her twin sister appeared, tall, slim, with the same kind of loose, mostly gray bun at the back of her head. The two Ottos, Tante Erica and I chatted and ate cookies; the ladies drank tea and I a glass of milk. It was mighty tame, pretty much like at some universal aunt's apartment where I hardly could wait to leave. Here, my reluctant patience was rewarded: Over the years, every now and then, for no apparent occasion, or no more occasion than I walking by this villa, one of the sisters would magically appear at the gate and ask me in for a few cookies or a piece of cake and a glass of milk. May be they just appreciated my polite "Thank you", accompanied by a smile. Whatever the reason, I was not about to question a source of cookies or cake. I never saw any of their young residents close up, which I did not mind one bit.

Monday, was the real start of Easter vacation. Friday, when I bicycled from the Voneschs to the Spoerrys, certainly did not feel like a vacation day - it had been a totally involuntary trip - and weekend days always liberated me from school. This first day of vacation I had plenty of time to fret to myself about the next day, when I had to report to a rabbi in Zurich for religious school. I was to prepare myself for my Bar Mitzvah, for my step up to religious responsibility at age thirteen, following rigorous study of Hebrew, of Torah, of Jewish laws and customs. It was to be the ceremony at which Walter had excelled and that had engendered the final festivities of the Jewish communities of Memmingen and Mindelheim before the final Nazi onslaught.

Like any Jewish boy my age, I knew that the thirteenth birthday and Bar Mitzvah were synonymous. But, when I passed that threshold, I still lived with the Voneschs and commuting to Zurich several times a week, on top of my long hikes to school in Herrliberg, must have seemed an impossible imposition to Aunt Jenny. She mentioned nothing about a Bar Mitzvah and I certainly did not ask. My interest was nil even though the possibility had emerged from a letter my mother had composed on 21 August, 1941, about two months before my thirteenth birthday:

> Say, will you be confirmed [Bar Mitzvah]? Aunt Cilli already wrote twice about it. I believe that it is not approprite to have festivities at this time. Papa will write about it.

If my father wrote about his and my mother's concerns, it was not to me. If my parents thought festivities were out of place, I certainly would have wanted no part of the event. The issue seemed settled, dead; now, that I lived within an easy walk from the train station, Aunt Jenny resurrected it.

She had announced her plans for me early in 1942, shortly before my move to Maennedorf. My profound and still vivid dislike of the religious training I was supposed to have absorbed in Memmingen, especially the specter of another intolerably boring Lehrer Liffgens, even if by another name, dampened my spirits. They would be a real downer, those confined hours. Still, riding the train thrice weekly from Mænnedorf to Zurich was a treat not to be dismissed lightly. If I had to submit, then I might just as well make the most of it. So, that Tuesday morning, the seventh of April, after breakfast, Francs that Aunt Jenny had given me in my pocket and seeing Zurich on my mind, I marched down to the railway station well before train time. I needed the extra minutes to exchange the bills in my pocket for a rail pass that would be good for a fixed number of rides to and from Zurich. I handed the money to the ticket agent, his stiff, blue, cylindrical, visored cap half way down on his forehead, and told him what I needed. He lifted a dirty-tan cardboard rectangle, a little larger than a credit card, from a cubbyhole, blessed it with some rubber stamp impressions, and slid it and the change to me. "*Danke*" I said and felt like the king of the railroad. A free ride to Zurich, not just occasionally, but three times this week alone! May be, just may be, this mix of religion and visits to the metropolis would not be so bad.

The engine's headlights beam directly at me as the train rounds a curve to the east; the bells at the grade crossing near the station start to clang, and the red and white barrier fence descends, all nearly simultaneously. The train stops and I clamber up the high-rise steps to the open platform at the end of a car marked with a large 3, third class. I push open the door, step inside and sit down on one of the wooden benches with their tightly packed horizontal slats, polished to a high shine over the years by the pants, skirts, jackets and coats of thousands of passengers. The seats had just the right curves for the bottom and back to remain comfortable on the half-hour ride. I settle down on the left side, toward the lake, and let the scenery roll by: houses, factories, gardens, the road to Zurich and on the lake a steamer or two and a few sail boats. We stop in Meilen, in Küsnacht and Zollikon, but the Herrliberg station, and others, flit by our Schnellzug, a breed between a milk train and an express. We rush through a tunnel long enough to bring darkness in the morning, but not so long that the lights are turned on, and then stop in Stadelhofen, my destination and the station just before the Hauptbanhof, the main station. Having been told that my stop was the light at the end of the tunnel, I already am standing on the landing when the train stops.

The rabbi's office was somewhere on the left bank of the Limmat, in the general area that Hanspeter and I had explored in years past. I had no trouble finding the address written on a piece of paper in my pocket, but knew I was in trouble as soon as the rabbi rose to welcome me into his inner sanctum. His face had the same pasty pallor I last had seen on Lehrer Liffgens during religious school in Memmingen. The rabbi's bony, tender-looking hands, light of grasp, evidently never had joined his brain in any physical or skilled work; they had no stories to tell, other than about turning pages in books. For the first half hour, the agenda called for a Hebrew lesson. Most of the little I had learned in Memmingen had been lost in some hidden pocket of my mind in the years of freedom from this strain. Learning Hebrew would have been tolerable even though I would have to practice and study between lessons, and during spring vacation at that, when the head was supposed to relax. It was what followed that stirred my first rebellion since I had left the home of my parents. The rabbi, in accordance with his duty and assignment, tried to teach me the tying on of *tfillin*, so I, as a budding observant Jew, would know how to perform this ritual before my prayers. These phylacteries are little cubic leather boxes into each of which is folded a little piece of parchment on which is written, in Hebrew, the *Shema*, one of the central prayers of Judaism. The words, the melody, the cadence, when sung during services celebrating Shabat, or other Holy Days, year after year, leave an imprint that may be obscured during years of religious silence, but that emotionally resurface at first rehearing. It is a symbol of belonging, of unity even among strangers; still, why should I have to follow the biblical injunction to "... bind these words on your arms and between your eyes ..."? I pretty much had grown away from praying, and, even if I did pray, I was no orthodox Jew and neither was I brought up in that confining tradition. Not only was I to perform the ritual, but I was supposed to tie the leather straps on to the left arm and around my head according to a prescribed pattern so the little shrines would be in the correct position. Not being particularly dexterous, I had one hell of a time getting it right, even by the end of the second half hour. The rabbi was amazingly patient, and even kind enough to lend me a pair of the *tfillin* so I could practice at home. Sure. No way! I took the wooden box with the *tfillin*, thanked perfunctorily, said good bye and kept them carefully tucked away, until the next lesson, two days later, when, unsurprisingly, I was just as clumsy about the procedure as two days earlier.

Aunt Jenny had invited me to join her for Mittagessen on Friday, after I had survived the third rabbinical lesson. I had stewed since Tuesday, after my first encounter with religious conservatism, about how I would tell her my troubles and that I wanted to be released from them. No question, I would tell her, but how? Whining was not my bag and an empty complaint, saying I just don't like it, would not sell. I forced myself to be as calm and objective as I could muster: The rabbi was boring; the three trips a week, after school, would take too much time away from my public school studies; I would never practice the rituals the rabbi was trying to teach me. I laid out my arguments, one by one after the maid had cleared away the dishes. Aunt Jenny had little sympathy for the first one; after all, religious school was supposed to be boring, it always had been. I think it was the middle argument that carried the weight. Whatever it was, I left her flat a ton lighter: She had agreed to cut my burden from thrice to once weekly, to forget about ritualistic practices; I needed to learn only the *Brochat*, the blessings, I was to recite before and after the rabbi had read "my" Torah portion plus the German translation of the Haftorah, the biblical commentary that follows the reading of the day's Torah verses. What a relief! The scenery looked better than ever on my train ride back to Mænnedorf.

On Wednesday the eighth of April, the day after my first session with the rabbi, I finally sat down and wrote a postcard to my parents, five days after I had opened the gate to the Kinderheim Hebron for the first time. I told them that I already very much liked being there, that I was going to religious instruction three times a week, and that I had a nice Easter and received one chocolate Easter bunny, one orange and some sweets from the Spoerrys.

On some of my religious rides to Zurich, I sat on the hill side rather than the lake side of the train. The coach wasn't crowded so I had no trouble finding a forward-looking window seat. I always have preferred to see where I was going rather than where I had come from. Around Küsnacht, as I looked at the passing suburban scenery, I took a double: From up there on the hill, a house, black and circular, looked down on me. Two oddities in one. I had never seen a black house and much less a round one. It looked elegant perched above its garden; bright metal strips several inches wide trimmed its contours along a balcony, its large windows, a door leading to the garden and the rim below the flat roof. I was fascinated and wished I could see the inside of this unique abode. Over the months, I spotted this black cylindrical home again and again. Then, one day, I have no idea with whom, I was to visit someone in the vicinity of Küsnacht. How we arrived is lost and immaterial. When we stopped, we stood, I stood, in front of this amazing house, round, black, modern, sleek. We were greeted by the owner, whoever it was, and ushered into a living room that even outshone the Adlers'. The furniture was beautifully simple, with clean lines, and the paintings on the wall and artwork on display reflected a sophistication that was totally new to me and thrilling. As the day was mild and sunny, we stepped onto the balcony and leaned on the stainless steel railing I had spotted from the wooden bench of the train. Other details have vanished; the only feature I clearly remember is the elevator - an elevator in a private home! Unheard of. We rode it the lower floor where the owner, a gentleman, took us out to the sloping garden brightened with flowers and productive with rows of vegetables and potatoes, a fruit tree or two and vines. When we left, I nearly levitated. I hardly could believe my good fortune: I had been invited to step within these curved walls, likely the only home like it on earth, the one I had spotted from the train. Unforgettable. I wish I knew who took me there and who the imaginative, yes, daring, owner was.

Now, with only a simple goal assigned, I seriously set about the task of preparing myself for my Bar Mitzvah. I wanted to disappoint neither Aunt Jenny or my absent parents, who would be told about my accomplishment by my relatives and me, nor embarrass myself. By then, mid-April, only a month remained before my brief, belated, but important moments in front of the largest congregation in Zurich. Undoubtedly, I made a bigger deal of my preparation than warranted by the difficulty of the assignment, but once a horse gets spooked by a noise, it will shy at at the same sound months later. I had been spooked by Lehrer Liffgens, so just the idea of having to memorize a few lines in Hebrew was a steep trail I had to conquer.

Had my parent's objections been overcome? Disregarded? Had they reached Aunt Jenny? I have no idea. I did what I was expected to do.

I had left the Kinderheim Rütibühl just one week ago. In these few days, my state of mind raced up and down like a rollercoaster: the trough of the separation from the Voneschs, the crest at having landed among the caring Spoerrys, then the scare of involuntary servitude embodied by religious school, and finally, high spirits again after Aunt Jenny had rescued me from excessive rabbinic exactitude.

The first few months at the Kinderheim Hebron followed suit. They inundated me with new impressions, events, and challenges. Some ripples never ebbed, others subsided only years later, after English had overgrown my German language roots. Sometimes, the currents pushed from all directions, piling wave on top of wave; other streams ran parallel, clearly separated, like fresh water spilling into a salty brine. Some streams disappeared from sight before others emerged. I was caught in a maelstrom, in confusion. Now, when I look down from the pyramid of time, the swirls in which I was caught resemble those in a spiral galaxy, each whorl distinct but relatable to the whole. But then, that spring of 1942, in Maennedorf, and in the following months, all was a muddle of happenings, some of transient importance, some that changed my life.

Shadows of the future

Around the 20th of April I received a postcard from Germany. At first glance I thought it was from my parents. It wasn't. It was the very same card I had sent them on the eighth. Sprawled across *Familie J. Liebschütz, Mindelheim (Bay. Allgæu) Dreerstrasse 7/II,* the address I had written, was the word: *"Zurück"*.- Return, stamped twice, in large letters, diagonally from bottom left to top right. Angled in the opposite direction, partly obscuring the address, was a sticker: *"Abgereist ohne Angabe d. Adresse*", also rendered in French below.- Departed without leaving an address. And, squeezed near the top margin, just above the stamp and around the corner, I read, hand-written, in German: "Addressee departed location unknown 14/4" followed by a postal clerk's initials. What happened? How come my parents moved? My parents would never have moved without letting me know that they did and where to. What was going on? Where were they? How could I write to them? Had they been able to emigrate, after all? Without me? Where to? Nothing made sense.

Tante Erica had no more idea than I did. We just have to wait and see, she counseled. Neither Aunt Jenny nor the Bollags, nor any other relatives seemed to have a clue. I was left to wonder and to worry.

....

> We thank you very much for your lines, Aunt Jenny and Cilli, which we received some days ago. It was again a sign of life, especially since our offspring again has not written for two weeks. He did not yet answer our question on why he is so lazy about writing. Is he so overloaded with schoolwork or is he such a ski enthusiast that he cannot find time to write a card to his long-waiting parents? Who knows how much longer he still will be able to give us this small pleasure.
>
> (My mother, in a letter to Aunts Jenny and Cilli, jointly, 7 March, 1942)

....

Did Aunts Jenny or Cilli have any clue of the import of the words "...*how much longer...*"?

……

> Many thanks for the pretty little card for my birthday, which arrived in plenty of time. I can use the good wishes only all too well. We have to leave to fate whether or when they will be fulfilled.
>
> (My mother, in a postcard to me, 15 March, her birthday, 1942)

……

My mother's card probably arrived shortly before my move from Rütibühl to Mænnedorf. Did her last sentence make any impression on me? Did the implication of the word *"whether ..."* get lost in the upheaval of my impending move? Even if not, just what would I have concluded? Certainly not the monstrous evil being perpetrated less than half a day's train ride away.

Then, around 10 May, about a week before my Bar Mitzvah, the mail carrier delivered a short letter from my grandmother in enviably clear and firm handwriting, from Regensburg, where she lived in a resthome because of recurrent heart trouble:

> "Today, I received a card from your parents and they are doing well and are healthy and they inquired about you"

one sentence read. Not a word of where they are. If they could write to my grandmother, why could they not write to me? Could it be because the glacial winter of 1941-42 all over northern Europe had turned disastrous for the Nazi armies in the East? Could it be that the Germans would not let mail traverse their borders, just in case the news of their defeats by the Soviets at the gates of Moscow might penetrate their censor's vigilance? But, what would be the use? We listened to the radio and read the newspaper and knew and rejoiced that someone finally had had been able to stop the German "supermen" and their march of destruction. Why had my grandmother's letter got through? Had my parents written something, some complaint, that aroused the censor's ire and might have landed them in jail? Why the silence from my parents? There were no answers, just questions that no one could or would answer. Just a void.

……

> 5. 4. 42. My dear ones !
>
> You can tell by the date that I had difficultly to get myself to write, especially this time. It is so difficult to have to tell you that dear Jakob & Fanny had the same fate as Marta & Martin. For us it is especially sad that the family is so torn apart. One just doesn't know whether one will see each other again. It is so difficult to tell dear mother even though

many are there too. I hope the [????] are doing acceptably. Who shall tell Wernerle? I feel so extremely sorry for the poor guy; he is so attached to his Papa. Please, write me his new address. Jakob informed that he [Werner] would be leaving Herrliberg. It's too bad, because he liked it so well there. [????] with these few lines [????] and fondest regards from

Your Bertl

I do not know whether Lydia and her husband still are here [????]

(Aunt Berta Bach, postcard to Uncle Victor Bollag, 5 April 1942 [????] = German script I could not decipher)

....

Jakob Israel Liebschuetz
Transport Muenchen
Piaski. Kreis Lublin, Deutsche Post Osten Piaski, 13 April, 1942

My loved ones,

You will be astounded to get news from here. What we never thought has happened. I don't want to give you any details about our stay; it suffices to say that I have never seen any dirt like this before. Our food is very meager. A cup of coffee in the morning and a bowl of soup in the afternoon, ca. 100 g bread per day. So I am asking that you send something, if feasible. We can use anything, because we likely will not receive our suitcases (30 kg per head). I have applied for work and hope that it will soon be my turn. If I am lucky, I will be going with Fanni into a different camp, for underground construction with 60 strong people under the direction of an acquaintance, Engineer Saenger from Munich, who has requested me. But don't believe that we are dispairing; we will hold out and grit our teeth. Even though strength diminishes with this meager food, we still hope that everything will only be a short interval. Please, write to Bertl and Max that we may receive double[weight] letters, i.e. per letter, be it peppermint candy or something else. All water must be cooked to be potable. We are here in much company (ca. 4000) and the daily views are terrible because there also are many old people among us. Besides, it's still very cold here; I have my blankets with me, which many do not have. Please, also notify Alfred about his. I can not tell you what a piece of bread or potato is for us; it is a great treasure. We all live in the ghetto, close together, on the floor, without straw for most.

Give our fondest regards to Werner who, we hope is well. Please, also give our regards to our aunts and all the relatives. If possible, send a response card when you write. Fondest regards,

your Jakob.

My loved ones !

We are here since the end of March and are cleaning the ghetto. One drowns in dirt without boots. Toilet in field and pasture; manure piles in front of the houses. Sleeping - living and cooking facilites for 16 in an old prayer hall. We are all Swabians and have gallows humor. It will pass. Give regards and kisses to our child

Fondly, your Fanni.

(Postcard from my parents to Uncle Victor Bollag)

....

This post card held the answers to my questions. Should Uncle Victor have told me? Did my parents not write to me because they did not want to worry me? Were they allowed just so many messages and asking for sustenance, aid in naked survival, had to take precedence over anything else? Nothing but questions.

School demanded my attention and my Bar Mitzvah was just days away when my grandmother's letter arrived. I subconsciously must have shoved my unease, my fears of the unknown, into cubbyholes of my brain where they would not interfere with my daily tasks. The sympathy and encouraging words offered by the Spoerrys, especially by Tante Erica, helped assuage my concerns. And, I suppose, for a boy not yet fourteen, the daily known tends to override the unknown.

Triumph and disgust

By the time I stepped up into the train, suitcase in hand, on Friday, the fifteenth of May, and headed for Zurich, I had memorized the two blessings in Hebrew and had no trouble smoothly and expressively reading the Haftorah in German. I was carefree as the scenery passed by outside the window until we were swallowed by the tunnel just before the Stadelhof station, my stop. I stepped off the train and noticed, as I had done repeatedly, that the big sign over the station restaurant entrance spelled TEA ROOM. I read it to myself; in German it sounds something like *Te:a Rom.* My suitcase wasn't heavy so I dawdled over to the right shore of the Limmat, across one of the bridges, past the Fraumünster, across the Bahnhofstrasse and over to the Bollags. On my way and during other wanderings about Zurich, I kept seeing TEA ROOM over the the doors of restaurants. In German, the word Tea and the girls' name Thea are prounced identically; obviously, a lady by the name of Tea Room must be fabulously wealthy, owning restaurants all over Zurich. How disappointing when I found out later, after I had learned some English, that there was no Croesus-rich woman behind this name, but that these tea rooms were restaurants where tea or coffee were the drinks of the day, not beer or brandy, and where proper ladies could meet to eat, to chat, without the aroma of stale beer or cigar smoke offending their sensibilities.

The Sabbath dinner that Friday was as enticing as always at the Bollags, dumplings in chicken broth, chicken roasted golden, roasted potatoes, a vegetable, and a dessert.

That evening, the conversation was about my big day, tomorrow, rather than about the week's business or school. Was I excited? Was I confident that I knew my parts? Nothing, nothing at all about the strange silence of my parents, at a "location unknown".

Early Saturday, I readied myself for the Shabbos morning service at which I was to be declared responsible for my religious life as a Jew. A Bar Mitzvah, becoming a son of the divine law, is not a declaration of personal independence and adulthood, but an assumption of responsibility for a continued, life-long search for Jewish knowledge, a declaration of a belief in Jewish precepts, and, above all, the acceptance of the God of Abraham, Jacob, and Isaac, the one God, the God of Israel. All this meant little to me; I simply did what I was asked, but less than I had been expected to do as a 13-year old boy. I have to assume that Aunt Jenny had decided that a ceremony without attendant festivities would not violate my parents' wishes, if she was aware of them.

I wore a white open-collared shirt, as I owned no tie, a sports jacket and a dark pair of slacks. Aunt Martha inspected my hirsute mattress to make sure it looked reasonably tamed and then she, Uncle Victor, Hanspeter and I walked to the synagogue that Saturday morning, the sixteenth of May, 1942.

I was stunned by the size of the sanctuary of the Lœwenstrasse Synagogue as we stepped through the wide-open portals on this sun-drenched Sabbath morning. The synagogue was already buzzing as friends greeted each other and exchanged news and gossip, as sure a fixture of the gathering for a service as the rabbi's sermon. The Bollags and I greeted Aunts Jenny and Edith, Aunt Cilli and Liesel, her daughter. That social duty out of the way, Uncle Victor and I found seats on the men's side of the sanctuary, not far from the *Bima,* the slightly raised stage with its lectern in front of the Holy Ark that enshrines the Torah scrolls. My heart beat accelerated and my stomach twitched when I realized that I would have to face all these people, hundreds of them, in this, the most prominent synagogue in Zurich. I was to be consecrated here because this is where Aunt Jenny worshipped. This would be vastly different from practicing at home, in Mænnedorf, with an audience of zero or, at most one, when Tante Erica had monitored my progress.

The rabbi entered, acknowledged the congregants with a slight bow of his head and then launched into the service. The time between this moment and the ceremony of removing the Torah from the Ark seemed endless. When it finally came, the rabbi lifted the scroll of eternal words from the Ark and handed it to a congregant standing next to him. This honoree cradled the scroll over his shoulder and seated himself on one of the throne-like chairs to the right of the Ark. Another gentleman then undressed the Torah. First he lifted off the silver *Rimonim,* the elaborately figured crowns that adorned the tops of two wooden posts on which the scroll was wound. Then he removed the *Chosen,* the silver breastplate, and the *Yad*, the silver pointer, both of which had been suspened by silver chains from the posts. He gently placed the pointer on the lectern and the other ornaments on a wooden stand specially designed for them. Finally, he - never a women in those times - lifted the protective, elaborately embroidered velvet garment from the scrolls and hung it on the stand. Now, he laid the Torah on the lectern and the rabbi unrolled it to the verses to be read on this Sabbath. However many men were called to chant the blessings before and after the reading of each verse, I, the youngest, the one just being admitted into Jewish responsibilities, would be last.

Did I wear a yarmulke, a head covering signifying that God reigned above us humans? I do not know. Were my shoulders covered with a *talles*, a prayer shawl, as I stood before God and the congregation? I owned neither of these religious symbols; this being a Conservative congregation, someone unquestionably lent them to me.

The rabbi briefly introduced me to the congregation and explained why my offices before the congregation were less than expected from other boys my age. Of my Hebrew name that he had bestowed on me, not knowing the one that had been given me soon after I was born, I only remember "... *Ben Jaacov*", son of Jakob, my father, absent at some "location unknown". On "Jaacov", I rose from my seat as I had been instructed, collected my thoughts, and purposefully walked to the front of the congregation, not too fast or too deliberately, ascended the few carpeted steps to the *Bima*, stopped next to the rabbi and faced forward over the sea of expectant faces, protected only by the lectern on which lay the opened Torah scroll with undecipherable Hebrew words inscribed on parchment, line upon line. After a whispered *"Jetzt"*.- Now, from the rabbi, I chanted the first blessing. The rabbi then intoned the Hebrew words before him, the verse of the biblical passage that ended that day's Torah portion, keeping his place with the *Yad* . After a second's pause, making sure he was done, as I had no idea which line was the rabbi's last, I chanted the closing blessing. With a breath of relief from me and, it seemed to me, from the now smiling congregation, I switched to the German translation of the Haftorah. My duties concluded, I relaxed. It was over; I had done it. It wasn't much, but I had done it. I was pleased with myself. It hadn't been so bad, after all. The rabbi then placed his hands on my head for the traditional blessing and ended the ceremony with a congratulatory handshake.

My legs were less rubbery as I walked back to my seat on the aisle and then sat down, waiting for the end of the service. I knew it was near when I heard the rythmically chanted prayer in honor of the dead, a cadence I knew well, the one that had announced impending relief during services in the synagogue of Memmingen, a stately edifice desecrated and destroyed by Nazi thugs in November 1938.

....

> How was the Bar Mitzvah of dear Werner; did he do his thing very well and did he recite from the Torah? It's really unique the good you and the two aunts [Aunts Jenny and Cilli] are doing for the child. And dear Jakob and dear Fanni will keep their will to live in spite of the great hardships and deprivations since they know that their only son is in such good hands and so well taken care of. My heaven reward your good deeds; may be some day our young ones will be able to recompense [not in a monetary sense] you.
>
> (Uncle Max Bach, in a letter to Victor and Martha Bollag, 16 May, 1942)

....

Congregants crowded around me as Uncle Victor and I nudged toward the door, praising my performance and demeanor, shaking my right hand in congratulations. The praises and handshakes followed me down the aisle and out into the still triumphantly sunny day. Some of the hands that shook mine not only conveyed pleasure, but also money, some bills, some Franc coins.

In retrospect, I can't help but wonder whether the outpouring of good will was prompted by what I had accomplished or for the circumstances that surrounded me. Whichever it was, I certainly reveled in its warmth.

As we passed through the portals of the synagogue, I felt taller than I had been less then two hours earlier and never before had I felt so materially rich. I had no inkling of how rich I was, but I kept sticking my hands into my pockets as the Bollags, the Adlers and I accompanied Aunt Jenny to her apartment, to assure myself that all that generosity still was safely tucked away.

I clearly remember the outpouring of affection from total strangers; why am I clueless about what presents, if any, I received from my relatives? There must have been some. May be it was plain cash, thoroughly appreciated but not memorable, may be clothing of some sort or other, goods I certainly needed after having outgrown most of what my trunks held when I had crossed Lake Constance to safety, the kind of present for which I always had lacked enthusiasm and heartfelt thanks. Presents should be extras, not essentials like clothing. Modest or not, that was my opinion.

Was the celebratory Mittagessen at Aunt Jenny's less starkly British than her everyday meals? I do know that I was grateful to her for having given me that special day, that hour in the radiant sun of attention.

After bit more conversation at Aunt Jenny's we, the Bollags and I, took our leave and hiked back to their flat so I could change to my travel clothes and catch a train back to Mænnedorf.

I still can see us standing by the door, the four of us, Uncle Victor, Aunt Martha, Hanspeter and I, my suitcase next to me. I gave Aunt Martha a good-bye and thank-you kiss and reached out to shake Uncle Victor's hand when he tucked a few Francs into my open hand. "For your fare." Then, Aunt Martha's edgy voice just as clear as the vision: *"Das brucht er ja nit. Er isch ja jetzt a reicher Mann"*.- He doesn't need that. He now is a rich man. Did I hear her correctly? Did she really say that? She did not look as if she were joking. Did she consider me rich, now that I had may be twenty or, at most thirty Francs in my pocket? How could she be so abysmally, disgustingly cheap? I felt the heat in my flushed face and the inner void after my heart had sunk into my stomach. I said nothing; I was stunned. Aunt Martha had turned triumph into disgust. One saving grace: Uncle Victor did not take back what he had given me.

And to think that she, Aunt Martha, most likely already had read the heartrending postcard written by my father and mother from the concentration camp in Poland, dated three days more than a month earlier.

I descended the stairway, opened the front door, dragged down the few granite steps to the sidewalk and then over to the Stadelhofer railway station. The miserable bitch, liberally translated from the Swiss epithet *Sauchaib.*

This slap of niggardliness was a crystallized my ambition. I resolved to become self reliant as soon as possible so I would not have to depend on the kindness of strangers or be humiliated by any cheapskate, family or stranger. That was the day, the day of my Bar Mitzvah, when self-reliance became my motto, my goal, my near obsession. And to never, ever be cheap.

Obviously, the incident still lives. But, as the years passed, the resentment abated, diffused by time and, at least partly, by the Swiss chocolate bars a now widowed Aunt Martha sent to our four children each Hanukah, four for each one on this festival of lights.

Then, a few years before her death, Aunt Martha visited us at our home in Fresno, a tiny, wrinkled old lady with a broad smile as she gingerly descended to the tarmack. One may not forget; one can forgive.

Unease, confusion and ignorance

After the euphoria of my Bar Mitzvah and the dumps induced by Aunt Martha had averaged out, life seemed as normal as I could wish. Then, late in May, a very short letter from my Grandmother, dated 15 May, the day before my big day; she asked this question:

> "Did you get a letter from your dear parents?"

No, I did not. Then, nothing, nothing at all, not from my parents, not from my grandmother, not until September. And then the message was not from either of them, but from Aunt Berta and Uncle Max Bach in Munich. On 6 September, 1942, they had written:

> We receive regular and good reports from your dear father and we are happy about it. Your dear mother, however, has not written for some time; there is a mail embargo. Dear grandmother also will take a trip in two weeks; I hope she will be well.

What does all this mean? Where are my parents? They seem to be separated. How come? If they can write to Munich, why not to me? My grandmother will be taking a trip. Where to? If they know *that*, why not *to where*? Maybe the mail embargo is a clue. The war may have disrupted mail service. Are my father and mother that far apart that my father's mail could get through, but not my mother's? Where are they, each one of them? I was totally confused. My father wrote to Aunt Berta and Uncle Max; they knew where he was. Did they know more than they could get past the Nazi censor? Were they protecting me from bad news?

Even before that September letter from Aunt Berta and Uncle Max to me, Aunt Jenny had received a postcard in what resembles my father's handwriting. It was postmarked 18 June, 1942.

> Mrs. Jenny Gundelfinger Zuerich
>
> We are informing you that your ~~grandchild~~ [sic] nephew and your niece (Mr. and Mrs. Liebschuetz) are in the vicinity of Lublin. Both are doing well, they are together and thank for the packages you sent. They also thank you for arranging the confirmation [Bar Mitzvah] of their son. They want to transmit to the latter and all relatives many heartfelt greetings. They would be pleased to receive further packages and transmittal of money because they need everything very badly. They wish you especially everything good and are sending you fond regards. You can reach Mr. L. at the address given below.
>
> Stamped: Jewish Social Selfhelp
> Jewish Help Committee
> Lublin - Rural

The wording obviously was not my father's: Wrong relative and no signature. I was told nothing about that card at the time.

A month and two days later, this message was typed on a postcard:

> Lublin-Majdan 20.7.1942
>
> Mr. Victor Bollag
> in Zuerich
>
> We can inform you that your cousin, Mr. Jakob Liebschütz, is doing well. He transmits his thanks for the many wonderful packages and, at the same time is requesting that, if at possible, you send more, to the current address. Any written messages will reach Mr. Liebschütz at the address given below. He thanks you from his heart for the continued care of his son Werner and, especially, for the beautiful Bar Mitzvah celebration that you and the other relatives made possible. He is sending fondest regards to you and all donors.
>
> Sincerely
>
> Jewish Social Selfhelp
> Jewish Help Committee
> Lublin - Rural

My parents at least had the satisfaction of knowing about my big day, although I had not known they knew. Could these messages have been faked to hide a terrible truth? The text of the earlier card obviously was not my father's, and the second card was totally lifeless, not a single word written by hand, by anyone.

My relatives handed me these cards, which I then read and re-read, only after war and the decimation of European Jews had ended. My kin, all of them, had remained silent in the intervening years. I do not question that they were protecting me from chagrin and despair until they thought I was mature enough to manage the terrible truth.

The Bachs then wrote to me again on 17 October, a month and a half after their letter about the "good reports" from my father: This time they wrote:

> We haven't heard anything from your dear parents in a couple of weeks..... We have had absolutely no news from dear grandmother.

Then, nothing, week after week, the rest of 1942. A void, as if my father, my mother, my grandmother, Aunt Berta and Uncle Max, all my remaining close family members in Germany, had simply vanished. I even wrote to my uncle and aunt and sent them a picture of myself. Nothing in response. But, I could not let my unease, confusion and ignorance about the fate of my family overwhelm my thoughts and days. There was no source of information I could tap; I could not break the silence of my relatives, a silence I did not know existed. The tasks imposed by school overshadowed my concerns and the Spoerrys calmed life's normal turbulences.

My family Spœrry

Tante Betli, Papa Spoerry's youngest daughter, Joan and I were strolling and chatting along in Chur, the gateway to the mountains of the Grison. Only then, in 1997, she, now near eighty, told me that the prospect of my coming to the Kinderheim Hebron had stirred some narrow Mænnedorf minds. Papa Spœrry casually had mentioned to a bank functionary that a refugee boy would shortly join their other charges. "*Isch er a Jude*?"- Is he a Jew? "Yes, why?" "We don't need such people in Mænnedorf." The inquisitor warned him that there might be unpleasant, unspecified repercussions if Herr Spœrry went ahead and opened his doors to me. Papa Spœrry, in response, blasted: "What I do is absolutely none of your business and I'll do whatever I wish". Besides, if he said one more word about it, he, Papa Spoerry, would tell the bank president about this impertinence. The red-faced blind mind said no more as Papa Spœrry swept out the door.

I can well imagine Papa Spoerry's vocal indignation. It rings true.

On an other day, not long thereafter, a clerk at the local post office questioned Papa Spœrry's wisdom in taking me in. "What if the Boches (the Germans) come and find you are housing a Jewish boy?" "I'll face the music if it plays and it's none of your business!"

Elisabeth and her father often were at swords point in her younger years, but pride rang in her voice as she told me these stories.

I came, innocent of the trouble I had caused him and neither expected nor looked for words or deeds fuelled by dislike of Jews; after all, this was Switzerland, my haven. And, so it turned out: No one ever even whispered any anti-Jewish word within my ears' reach, anywhere on Swiss soil.

Also, no one, but no one was to tell Papa Spœrry what he should or should not do. He would do what he knew was the right thing to do. He knew best. About everything, for everyone. No question, Papa Spoerry was a man of principles, his principles.

For him, the world was either black or white, just like his favorite, his only, colors in dress: black pants, black suspenders, black vest and jacket; white shirt, white handkerchief in his pants pocket. He either approved or disapproved of people, deeds, religions, whatever life set before him; he was not a neutral Swiss.

Papa Spoerry was a strong man, a stubborn man. I suppose he was born stubborn, but he had earned his powerful hands and arms as a young man, as a professional masseur, rubbing the rich and tired the right way, relaxing their muscles at spas and resorts in France, Italy and Switzerland. It was at one of these, in francophone Switzerland, where he met his future wife, she of the deep brown eyes that must have sparkled in her youth, but that reflected resignation, even sadness, after decades of molding by her overbearing husband.

Papa Spoerry was a man of the Bible, the Christian Bible, the Bible of Luther, Calvin and Zwingli. He knew every verse, every word; his interpretation of the text was unassailable, at least by anybody in the household. Catholic priests, the chief papists, were the heretics, and the papacy a dictatorial, rapacious institution that tried to dominate the world, all in the name of God and Christ. He had little use for Protestant clergy either. If he and Mama Spoerry ever attended church, I don't recall it. He needed no interpreter of biblical wisdom and injunctions; he could interpret them quite well himself. Either from my room, directly above the family living room, or from below it, when I worked to my assignments or indulged in some leisure reading, I heard Papa Spœrry's rightous voice hold forth on Christ, God and the bible to his captive audience, his wife and Tante Erica and, if visiting, her sister Leni and her husband, the parents of Maxi, that sweet little boy with the big brown eyes. Retreating into the kitchen to cook the Mittagessen or supper was a welcome escape for Mama Spoerry; a crying youngster sometimes helped spring Tante Erica.

Papa Spœrry's anti-papist monologues, his near longing for the religious wars of 400 years earlier, had one silver lining: They vividly supplemented my teacher's lectures about the Reformation and the religious slaughters it provoked in Europe, including in now peaceful Switzerland.

Tante Leni and her husband induced particuarly resounding religious harangues. They had committed an unpardonable sin, they had maliciously defied him and the Bible, his Bible. They had abandoned their heritage; they had become Jehovah's Witnesses!

I had never heard of these Witnesses before. Judging by Leni, cheerful, brown haired, well and solidly conformed, with an attractive full-lipped smile that was shadowed by her father's firm eyes, these Witnesses were just like anyone else; they neither sported horns nor haloes. I see the husband only dimly and what I see reminds me of Richard Nixon, always needing a shave and trusting no one. The two proved to be just as stubborn as Leni's father; they were not about to retreat. And neither would Papa Spœrry. One loud and miserable afternoon he ordered them to leave and never come back. It was a very bad day at the Kinderheim

Hebron. The women were crying, the men steaming, the air itself seemed to shrink so that nothing separated the family members but anger mixed with chagrin. And he, as always, had been right. He vehemently had opposed the marriage between Leni and her husband, the Witnesses' seductor.

If that was what religion was about, the less the better.

Leni and her husband left the next day, carrying their little boy with them. A dismal day indeed. The two were excommunicated from the household until her father was dead. All so foolish, disgusting.

Sadness deepened and my anger rose when a few years later the little boy, Tante Erica's nephew, that lovely child, Maxeli, died. Cause of death: parental stubborness, blind parental faith in an all-knowing God whose presumed will must prevail. The parents, as convinced Jehovah's Witnesses, had refused medical intervention even after it was clear that cancer bulged behind one of the little boy's eyes. So absolutely, utterly infuriating, profoundly disturbing.

If that was what religion was about, the less the better.

In spite of his religious conceits and self-rightousness, Papa Spoerry not even once either denigrated any aspect of Judaism or even remotely suggested conversion to his, the true belief. He had taken me in as a Jew, out of principle and like any other paying guest, not to rescue a lost soul. And that I respect.

A few hours or a day after one of Papa Spœrry's outbursts, whether about religious or secular sins of others, Tante Erica would unburden herself to me, when her father was out of the house, to me, the outsider with inside knowledge, the receptive teenager who also knew troubles, the boy who had learned to keep confidences when still a child, the *de facto* orphan who trusted her as he would trust his mother. She then would tell me how her father had browbeaten her mother and his daughters, how strict and unforgiving he was; how kind he was with the children under their care, how respected and sought-after he was as a masseur; how miserable she felt, how she had no choice but to remain at home for the sake of her mother and because she loved taking care of children. I listened patiently and with curiosity, offered encouragement and a handkerchief when needed. We became each others best friends and confidants.

I hid as best as I could the lay of my sympathies and could not even have imagined butting in when the air was rancid with recriminations. I learned to navigate through the family storms without getting soaked myself and I managed to retain Papa Spœrry's trust almost as much as Tante Erica's, although the ground became slippery at times.

Tante Betli, diminutive for Elisabeth, diminutive in stature, the youngest and prettiest of the three daughters, lived on that slippery ground. In the snapshot in front of me, her lovely smile shines on little blond Claudia, the apple of her eyes, about a year and a half old, her right arm around her mother's neck, her bottom supported by her mother's arms, clad in a white dress with a satin ribbon around the chest, white stockings on her legs and fluffy slippers on her feet. Claudia squints at the photographer in the bright sun, her lips tightly closed between her fat baby cheeks and her soft hair, curly at the ends, parted on the left. In a later picture, her now unsquinting deep, dark eyes are those of her mother's mother, Mama Spoerry's. She and Maxeli, her cousin, were the most beautiful, darling children I ever had seen. And Papa Spœrry, their grandfather, had virtually shoved them out of his life because of the perceived sins of their mothers. They, two of his daughters, had married men of whom he disapproved. They had married. They no longer were his to dominate.

Tante Betli, bright and lively, with a flair her father could not handle, had married Fritjof Bachmann, a landscape architect, blond, tall, genteel. How could any daughter's father possibly have objected to him as a future son-in-law? Tante Betli occasionally stopped by, mainly when she knew her father would be elsewhere, massaging the backs of clients or on some lengthy errand. On those occasions Mama Spœrry could indulge in being Claudia's grandmother, holding her on her lap, hugging and kissing her. Papa Spœrry never would have condoned a visit in reverse. If he happened to come back while Tante Betli and Claudia still were in the house, he grumbled, slammed the door and hid in his office. He did soften on Christmas, when the entire family, including any children who were not home with their parents, mainly just I, gathered in the festively decorated family living room, ornaments and glowing candles on the Christmas tree, and sang seasonal carols, with Tante Erica at the harmonium. Peace in the house.

Tante Erica did visit her sister occasionally, and so did I. Tante Betli and her family lived in Meilen, a train stop closer to Zurich than Mænnedorf. Sometimes, when I came back from Zurich, I would hop off the train in Meilen, visit with Tante Betli and Claudia and then catch the next train home. Claudia would greet me with outstretched arms, an enthusiastic "*Onkel Werner! Hoppe hoppe Reiter!*" I sat down on the nearest chair and bounced the little miss on my lap while her mother fixed us a snack, milk and cookies and, in cold weather, cocoa. Cocoa made with whole milk was delicious, but made with condensed milk, it was a special treat. Condensed milk was precious during these war years, rationed like many foods. Being served such a rich, chocolatey brew made me feel royally spoiled.

During these visits, about which Papa Spœrry grumbled into his goatee, but which he apparently felt he could not forbid, Tante Betli regaled me with stories about her work at the hospital in Mænnedorf, where she had been executive secretary to the chief surgeon. She related tales about professional jealousies among the physicians, about seductive inducements she was offered by some, about operations her boss had to rescue after an underling, and especially the patient, had ran into difficulties, about the troubles with her father, about Swiss authors who she felt were being neglected, particularly Gottfried Keller. On and on she talked, until I had to catch the train. I was fascinated about these peeks into a world of which I had known nothing.

I don't know when I last read the two little volumes by Keller that Tante Betli and her husband gave me in 1945 or even the gist of the stories he had told. For me, the story is in the memories these booklets evoke, memories of a loving family that welcomed me.

The Bachmann's apartment was spotless, neat, styled of the times, modern furniture with clean lines expertly executed. Calm, not cold. It was here where I first noticed the difference between pictures on the wall and art. Tante Betli personally introduced me to these pictures, one by one, like to friends at a party. She and the creations somehow awakened my abiding interest in art as none of the pictures at home or at any of my relatives had done. Maybe my eyes and mind just then were ready for the experience and the Bachmann's taste happened to coincide with my nascent appreciation. Tante Betli has been a collector of beautiful things throughout her adult years. When we, Joan and I, visited her, now a widow, in the 1980s, her large flat on the second floor of an old house in Mænnedorf resembled a museum in search of a curator. It was stuffed with pottery, art glass, vases, figurines, paintings; not just scattered items, but whole collections crafted by a given artist, in glass-doored breakfronts and stashed on the floor. Most impressive of all, about a half dozen antique armoires, some black, some brown, beautifully hand-decorated in rustic style, dominated the large vestibule and hall. A fascinating clutter. I certainly was glad to have a flashlight along when I had to find my way to the bath room at night along the narrow trail between the museum pieces in the hall. I could have turned on the light, if I could have found the switch.

The aura of the young Bachmann's apartment was calmer than Tante Betli tended to be. Her enthusiasm was infectious, whether for art, gossip, literature or languages. Her fluency in French and Italian inspired me to diligently apply myself to French and English at school. She was excitable, but could be calm under vexing circumstances. It had been time to take her exam to qualify as a medical secretary. She had studied and studied; still, the combination of excitment and her monthly visitor - never, ever would she or Tante Erica have used the simple word menstruation in conversation with me - churned her insides as she sat down to face the questions in front of her. A few minutes, and she no longer could hold it down; she vomited, into her purse. She felt the cold beads of sick sweat on her forehead; she swallowed hard, answered the questions, and finished with the top score in the class. How could I not admire her, just as did Tante Erica, her sister?

Tante Erica was the one who had welcomed me almost the moment I had leaned my bike against the fence of the Kinderheim Hebron in April of 1942. She became my substitute mother and father, my confessor and advisor, my friend, my prod when I needed one, my window into the world of women.

Most of my relatives were good to me all of the time and all were good to me most of the time, but in no way were they substitute parents, other than in providing material necessities and some extras. The youngr ones had their own children; Aunt Jenny, though a thoughtful provider, just was not the parental type. Besides, all lived far away, maybe not far in distance, some less than an hour by train; but, a train ride is an eternity when a boy needs a parent, even if understanding, sympathy and good advice and, yes, the intimacy that envelopes parent and child, had been waiting at the destination. When a boy needs a parent, down the hall or up the stairs is far enough and the distance between school and home about as far as the questions and emotions can be reined in. Tante Erica lived within this realm.

When I saw Tante Erica, I was home, regardless of who I ran into first, second or third after school, after a trip to Zurich or an errand down in the village. When I wandered up into the spring-time beauty of the hills above Mænnedorf to gather as big a bouquet of flowers as I could carry, daisies, black-eyed Susans with their golden ring of petals, some now nameless blue, white and red blossoms, all mixed together, the bouquet was for Tante Erica, first and foremost. It was she to whom I handed it and it was she who set this bundle of spring in a vase and placed it at the center of the dining table. It was my "thank you" for listening to me with tales from school, with stories about relatives, for coming to my room to say good night, for not complaining, almost approving, when she saw the floor of my room strewn with copies of *Das Gelbe Heft, "s' Gæli Heftli*" in Zurcher dialect, a blend of *Time* magazine and *National Geographic.*

I buried my nose in these pages after my homework was finished and after the other members of the family had read each issue. I leaned out of my bed and took one or another, at random, paying no heed to year or date, and propped my head on my horse-hair pillow squeezed into an inverted V against the headboard. I read, looked and travelled in my mind to far-off countries I likely never would see and peoples among whom I never would walk. Just as I now scan the *New Yorker* for the cartoons before I delve into the text, so I scanned the thin crisp pages of the magazine, named for the yellow-framed cover page, for photos of dark skinned women, naked down to the hips, who frequently graced its pages. So, that's what's below all that bulging clothing of women in winter and below the fetching blouses girls wore in summer! I never thought about it then, but with killing scouring almost every continent, every second, some photographers still were busy helping explain nearly clotheless and other dark exotic cultures to us in quiet white Switzerland. Else, the magazine had laid in a stash of these enlightening photos before the war, just as the Swiss government had squirreled away grain and oil.

It's not that I needed Tante Erica to come to my room to say good night; after all, I was in my early teenage years. Downstairs would have been just fine. Coming upstairs was an escape for her, an excuse. There, in my room, out of range of Papa Spoerry's well-tuned ears, she could reveal what transpired during the day, while I was in school. She couldn't dawdle, else "*Wo bisch du Erica? Kann d'r Werner nit selbscht zum Bett gehe*?"- Where are you Erica? Can't Werner get to bed by himself? with sort of a sarcastic rise in voice toward the question mark. "*I komm, I komm*!" A quick "*Guete Nacht*" and gone she was.

When Tante Erica wanted to talk to me in my room, she made sure she closed the glass-panelled door that separated the upstairs vestibule, the antechamber of the family living room, the master bedroom and the upstairs bathroom, from the staircase that led to the three bedrooms on the third floor, including mine. That door helped contain drifting voices. One time she had not closed it, and, in a few bounds, two steps at a time, Papa Spoerry loomed in the doorway as I sat on my bed and Tante Erica leaned against the wall by the window. He looked, grumbled something unintelligible, turned around and left. Had we disappointed his dark expectations? Tante Erica always left the door open when she was in my room. She had nothing to hide but words.

When my nose ran and my throat was sore, it was Tante Erica or Mama Spoerry who would fix me whatever concoction seemed appropriate to alleviate the misery. I suppose pharmacy remedies existed, but, for colds, hot water fortified with honey and lemon juice probably worked as well as anything fancier. That elixir, plus aspirin for fever and Nivea cream dabbed on the nose, red and sore from being endlessly wiped with a succession of cotton hankies, until each one was too wet for further duty, were our pharmacopoeia. Fortunately, my mother had packed at least two dozen of these cotton squares for me, blue, brown, wine red, before I left home in 1939; some of them lasted well into my adult life. This repeated use of the same snotty hanky before it was washed might not meet today's ideas of sanitation, but that is what we, or any one else had; it was before the age of Kleenex and its imitators, years before the word virus had invaded common speech.

If my stomach or its vicinity complained, then chamomil tea was the cure, just as it had been at home. No wonder whatever bug it may have been took flight when that urine-colored, ill-flavored infusion reached my innards. My palate had to suffer through it because it was supposed to be good for the stomach. And to think that now chamomil is one of the fad herbs in the tea caddy of just about every two-bit restaurant and café, and of fancy ones too. For me, it's just like breakfast in bed: I would have to be very sick to acquiesce in either.

All the Spoerrys valued education, but it was Tante Erica who checked over my homework and who listened as I recited my new vocabulary words for French; she knew enough to tell whether I got it right without having to follow in the little booklet in which I wrote all the new words, French in the left column, German opposite. When Tante Erica wasn't sure, Mama Spoerry would know the correct pronunciation; after all, French was her native tongue.

Tante Erica wasn't all work and no relaxation. Embroidery was her hobby and she thought I should learn it, too.
"You must be kidding; embroidery's for girls!"
"I know a man who embroiders, a famous man."
"Who?"
"King Gustav of Sweden."
"Really?"
She taught me and I learned. Nothing fancy, just cross stitching. I became adept enough to embroider pre-printed napkins, ladies' hankies and doilies that I then could convert into little presents for relatives and for her. The King of Sweden had convinced me, but the pleasure of creation kept me crossing threads several years.

Above all, it was Tante Erica who consoled and encouraged when the world weighed on me.

On 15 February 1943, nearly a year after my move to Mænnedorf, Uncle Max wrote to me from Munich:

> "Everything that could be done to hear something from your loved ones has been done, but, unfortunately without success."

And, Aunt Berta added:

> "... children in our resident association ... don't have it so good. I am always so happy that you were saved from all this."

The void was growing.

The world was heavy on that day, in May of 1943, when I received a letter from my parents, the last message it would be, the final sign of life before they were hurled into the abyss of anonymous death by the fanatical Nazi cowards, the most depraved cowards that ever polluted the earth. And this is what my parents wrote:

[Handwritten letter]
Censor's mark 841-395

Saturday before Easter; 4 AM [24 April 1943]
[no location given]

Dear Werner!

I want to give you a sign of life before our departure. As you already may have heard from Aunt Martha, we are leaving today with many others and I don't know whether or not you will be receiving news from us again soon. Don't worry about us because of it; we are doing very well and we continue to be in good spirits and everything will turn out all right. The time will come when we will see each other again to start a new life. Always do what the dear relatives tell you; they want the best for you. Take a heartfelt "farewell" and kiss from me

Your
Vati

My dear little Werner !

Now we have to take leave from here, i.e. in another direction than we thought. Papa helped load many things for us these last few days and we will not suffer any deprivation if God wills it. Then we will get to work and we want to act for the benefit of all. May you live well and get well settled in Maennedorf. The fog will not be so bad. The aid society wrote that the people where you are are very nice. We have good companions and are not sad because we know that you are in good hands.

Give our fond regards to all loved ones and take my innermost kisses and regards always wishing good luck, good health and a happy reunion in the future

Mutti

The unimaginable news was not within the lines they penned in that quarter of the day the Spaniards call *la madrugada*, the dark and empty hours between midnight and dawn, on that frightening morning, but in the blank spaces between them. I knew my parents had been shipped to Poland. Now they would be taken even further east, "... in another direction than we thought". It would be even closer to the fighting front with the Soviets, where spring then still was but a glimmer and dangers more immediate. Little did I know the real source of the danger to my parents and the "many others", but what I now had been told was bad enough. The distance between them and me was growing, not shrinking. "... we will not suffer any deprivation if God wills it." My mother's words were not those of hope, but of resignation. How unfathomly difficult it must have been for my parents to write these paragraphs, to leave me with at least a smidgen of hope, when hope for them, and all those with them, hung by a vanishing thread.

It was on that day of May, which one I do not know, after I had opened and read this message from the edge of the abyss, that I needed a shoulder on which to cry, someone to comfort and encourage me, someone who could convince me that not all hope was lost. Tante Erica was that person. Mama and Papa Spoerry sympathised and tried to reassure me, but the aura of parent, beyond exact description but unmistakable, enveloped only Tante Erica.

The universe that had nurtured me was receding ever more. Did it still exist somewhere? Would it reappear some day, after the scourge that was devouring most of Europe had been stopped? Or, would this universe's once warm glow, its comforting and inspiring beings, become but memories for those who had escaped its willful destruction? I had no such coherent questions; I did not know enough to have framed them. I simply was lucky, very lucky, that Tante Erica was there for me, that Aunt Jenny had insisted I move to Mænnedorf, despite my protests.

As I adopted Tante Erica as a parent, my mother/father, so she adopted me as her son, a son with an absent father. As is common with single parents attached to an only child, when no other caring adult is near with whom to share confidences, the lives of the two, the adult and child, become intertwined and the normal gap between generations narrows and even vanishes. The two tend to entrust each other with thoughts and worries they would not or could not confide to others. The older relates experiences and secrets the younger one eagerly absorbs, one to whom this knowledge illuminates a heretofore shadowy world, one now no longer hidden behind curtains of age and social convention.

I noticed that Tante Erica's cheeks occasionally shrank under a pallor and that she lacked her usual energy. She even took aspirin. When I asked what was wrong - she had no symptoms of a cold - she brushed off the question with "Nothing serious. I'll be all right by tomorrow". But, when these down periods happened again and again, I wanted to know what ailed her. Still, evasion always answered my questions. It was Kitty who janked open the curtains.

Kitty, blond, buxom, breezy, loud, had blown into the Kinderheim from somewhere. She also was a refugee kid, a little younger than I in years but with a city sophistication that made me feel like the rube she seemed to think I was. I did not care for her at all. Her room was next to mine, also on the third floor, to the right. She always was in some crisis or other, yelling about this or that, behaviour out of my experience, except for the occasional tantrums that engulfed Hanspeter Bollag. Kitty didn't stay long, just a couple of months or three, but long enough to inadvertently help enlighten me about Tante Erica's occasional headaches and pallor.

I was studying downstairs, trying to concentrate, when a burst of Kitty yells disturbed the house. Tante Erica and Frau Steiger-Lohr, the day-lady who helped about the Kinderheim, raced up the two flights of stairs to where Kitty was howling gibberish, at least to my ears. The decibles subsided to Kitty's normally loud effusions after the two ladies had come to rescue her from whatever danger seemed to threaten. All I heard then was excited talk, incoherent to me, rushing about upstairs and feet rattling down the stairs to the bathroom on the second floor; there was none on the floor where Tante Erica, Kitty and I had our rooms.

I couldn't stand it any longer. I had to know what was going on, what the exitement and racket were about. I barely had reached the middle of the lower set of stairs when Tante Erica yelled: "Stay down! Don't come up here!" That was no request; that was a command. I retreated, more puzzled than ever. What could possibly be the big deal?

Calm returned after a while and the three came downstairs, the two ladies normally calm and Kitty with a pleased, enigmatic smile on her face. What a turnabout! From murderous screeches to superior smile in but a quarter of an hour.

Later that day, when I passed Kitty on the stairs, she descending, she stage-whispered under that same enigmatic smile: "I am a women now!" "What? What do you mean"? "You'll find out some day." I had no clue what she was talking about and she would say no more. Damn irritating.

No answers for me, from Kitty or from the adults that day. I did not like to be kept in the dark about intriguing events that transpired almost under my nose, in this case above my head, literally and figuratively. Then, one afternoon, a few days later, when Papa Spoerry was out of the house, Tante Erica beckoned me into the backyard, to the bench in the gazebo. There she explained to me the secrets of female coming of age, about the eggs and the lining of the uterus, the monthly cycle that originated her discomfort and Kitty's panic at her first period. Utterly amazing. Was there ever a lot I didn't know! Apparently, Kitty had been as ignorant of that fact of life as I had been; no one had prepared her for this transformation. Once she knew, she was thrilled to be a certified women. And I at last knew the reason for the mysterious smile she had thrown in my face.

In spite of all the noise and the revelations, the word *m enstruation*, even *Regel* (period), remained unspoken. When Tante Erica obviously had her monthly low and I let her know I could tell, the invariable answer was: "*Die Tante bsuecht mi.*"-

The aunt is visiting me. After all that secretive fiddle faddle about a perfectly normal recurrent annoyance, no wonder I have learned to prefer unvarnished facts, even blushing frankness, to circumlocutions and euphemisms, whether about life, death, or sex.

I had one more question for Tante Erica: "Do boys have something similar to a period?" "No, not really." OK. I was satisfied and relieved I would not have to cope with a monthly "visitor". Whether it was a month or a year later, I do not remember. It wasn't similar, but it sure was disturbing and puzzling. One night, a strange dream interrupted my sound sleep, an etherial image I never had seen before, a dream accompanied by a feeling I never had experienced before, startling and vaguely pleasurable. Pleasurable only till I was fully awake: My pajama pants were wet! Good God, had I wet my bed? That just could not be! No way! When I touched the fabric, it did not feel watery wet, but slithery wet. What in the world had happened to me? I had no inkling and certainly no answers in the middle of that interrupted night. I had to do something; I couldn't just lie there in the squishy dampness. I eased out of bed, stuck my feet into my slippers, wrapped myself in my robe to make sure I was well covered, just in case someone would see me, and quietly felt my way down the unlit stairs and to the bathroom. I turned on the light, opened my robe and looked at my pajama pants. Yikes! A big wet spot, not drippy but wet. What to do? Had I done something wrong? Was something wrong with me? I had to do something; I just couldn't go back to bed as I was. I took off my robe, carefully lifted one leg and then the other so the strange stuff would not touch my legs as I climbed out of the pajama bottoms. I washed the goo off my crotch and then thorougly rinsed the wash cloth. Whatever it was, I wanted it off me. Next, I picked up my pajama pants and rinsed out the offending stuff the best I could, rang out the water, patted the wetness with my towel and squeezed the pants into a bundle. Then, I washed my hands with soap and water, dried them and slipped back into my robe, bottom bare. I tucked the bundle under my arm and, as quickly and quietly as I could, headed back to my room. No one had seen me! Safely in my room, I shoved the victimized pants to the foot of my bed, put on undershorts, pulled the Federbett up to my chin and was out in no time. I suppose the exitement of the unknown and figuring out how to deal with the mess had worn me out rather than inflamed my imagination. At the ring from my alarm clock, I rolled out of bed and took care of the start-of-day necessities as usual. As usual, except that I made my bed before breakfast rather than after. I pulled back the featherbed, carefully spread out the still damp pajama pants, pulled the featherbed up again, tucked the pajama tops under my pillow and headed down for breakfast.

I tried to shove the night's event out of the way, but it intruded on and off all day. What caused that night-time mess, that disturber of my sleep? I simply had to find out what my odd dream and its gucky wet ending were about. Who could I ask?

Certainly not Papa Spoerry; no way would I ask him about such a strange event, or anything else personal. He was too remote and judgmental. And Mama Spoerry, not way either; I would have been much too embarassed to tell her about this weird dream. Neither could I have waited until I had a chance to ask one of my older cousins in Zurich, even if I had had the nerve to ask. I had to have an answer, and soon. What if my sleep again were invaded so mysteriously and annoyingly? Tante Erica was the one, the only one; there was no one else who I could ask.

Within a day or two, when no one with big or knowledgable ears was around, I told Tante Erica about my night-time disturbance. She assured me that such dreams were quite normal in boys my age, that they were nothing to worry about, that they were a sign of maturation, just as Kitty's period had been, but quite different. Was I ever relieved: I was normal; there was nothing wrong with me; there was nothing to be ashamed of. Tante Erica had explained it all objectively, with ease and without unease for me. If she had had "*Wie sag's ich meinem Kinde?*" - "How do I tell my child", a famous sex education bible, on her shelf, a book that my parents likely would have used to enlighten me, had they been allowed to see me mature, she undoubtedly would have let me enlighten myself about these mysteries of life .

Now that Tante Erica had educated me about Kitty's and my heretofore mysterious awakening, I felt free to ask her other questions about women and men and she seemed to think I was mature enough to confide in me what she could or would not tell others.

Years earlier, in her twenties, Tante Erica was engaged as a *Kindermædchen*, a nanny, by a well-off couple. She got the youngsters out of bed in the morning, changed the babies' diapers - cloth, non-disposable - took the trio to the park or for a walk, played with them, tucked them in at night, after the parents had said good night, and dragged herself out of bed when any of them cried during sleeping hours. She ate with the cook/maid, but had a room to herself. Except one evening, the father of the children asked to share her room and bed for just a spell, while his wife was out with some lady friends. Erica declined, politely, although he was handsome, with otherwise gentlemanly demeanor, and explained that she was hired to take care of the children's needs, not his wants. It wasn't easy to turn down his blandishments or the flame within, but her upbringing just would not allow this breach of conduct. After this surprise, she stayed on just long enough to give reasonable notice, without arousing uncomfortable questions by the lady of the house about why she was leaving.

I believed what she told me, but was puzzled that she was so well informed about matters sexual. Could one learn that much just from having read books and listened to others? However she had learned the "facts of life", she verbally demystified them for me, clearly and accurately. She also made me realize those many years ago, when open talk of sex still was a major taboo, what only recently has become an insight to many: Womens' attitudes and responses to sexual interactions do not necessarily mirror those of men. Tante Erica also instilled in me a general respect for women, not a given then or now, without ever having it writ large. I credit her for the ease with which I have interacted with women, young or ageless, socially or professionally, over the decades.

Was I a perfect boy? Unlikely. Still, I remember only once when Tante Erica berated me, shamed me, taught me a lesson I never forgot. A boy a little younger than I had arrived. For whatever reason, I didn't care for him. It was Saturday and time to shine our shoes, he his, I mine.
Somehow, the notion had invaded my head that he, being younger than I, should shine my shoes. I being the older one, and, therefore the boss, could demand this service. He couldn't possibly refuse; it would be unreasonable and unsafe, because I was bigger. But he did.
"You better, or else!"
"No!"
I punched him, once, twice. He cried.
Tante Erica hustled by. She couldn't believe what I had done; that I had done such a nasty and cowardly deed.
"Don't you ever again bully anyone! Never, ever, take advantage of someone weaker than you are! Apologize, right now!"
I did. Lesson learned.

Which winter it was may be in the record books, but not in my memory. Likely it was the severe and unrelenting winter when Lake Zurich froze from shore to shore, when my cold feet led to flushed cheeks. During this extraordinarily frigid winter, the moisture in my exhaled breath had turned into frost along the edge of my bed covers, just an inch or two from my mouth, and the wall next to my bed glistened with ice crystals at dawn. Tante Erica's room, to the east of mine, was just as cold. The room to the west was empty. The heat rising through the floor and stairwell simply was insufficient to keep our rooms above freezing, night after night. Something had to be done.

The adults finally decided the two of us, Tante Erica and I, had to move downstairs. There was only one spare room, a large one with two beds. One twin-sized bed hugged the wall on the right as one entered the double door, the other one the wall on the left. The bed on the right was to be Tante Erica's, the other one mine. No problem. We both had robes and dressed and undressed alone or in the bathroom. I usually was asleep by the time Tante Erica had finished all her chores and read a book or magazine for a little while. Then, one Saturday night, I still was awake when Tante Erica slipped into her bed and we started talking. Conversing across the room in a stage whisper was getting to be a strain, but we could not talk normally, else her parents, directly above, might hear us. So, I got out of bed in my flannel pajamas and sat, leaning against the head board, next to Tante Erica whose blankets reached to her neck. After a while, my toes felt cold, so I slipped them under her covers. When the chill kept spreading upward, I slid a bit lower and tugged Tante Erica's blanket and featherbed over my legs, up to my hips. All the while we talked.

Suddenly, a small black shape appeared at the open door. It was Mama Spoerry.
"What in the world are you doing?"
"Talking."
"If Papa had caught you like this, he would have thrown both of you out of the house, tonight. I saw the light so I came down to turn it off. Get back into your own bed, Werner, and don't either of you ever do this again!" All this in a worried whisper, worried that Papa Spoerry might wake up and ask what was going on, find out, and then explode.

The threat of expulsion in disgrace, though suffered innocently, raced my pulse and flushed my cheeks. I crawled into my cold bed, turned toward the wall, pulled my covers up to my nose and said nothing.

"We just were talking, nothing more. What's wrong with that?" whispered Tante Erica.
"Nothing, but didn't you realize how it looks ...?"
Then Mama Spoerry turned, switched off the light and silently disappeared through the open door.

The incident never was mentioned again, by anyone. By that time I knew enough not to ask what the fuss was all about.

In our foolhardy innocence we never even thought of turning off the light; we had nothing to hide. Besides, Papa Spoerry had decreed from the start that the door would remain open when both of us were in the room. He knew from Luther and Zwingli that every women and every man, no matter the age and how well-intentioned, is subject to the ravages of carnal temptation and he took "keep us from temptation" as a cardinal principle.

After the winter had relented, Tante Erica and I moved back to our respective rooms. When we visited each other, not only stayed the door open, but daylight prevailed.

I learned much about life during the four years with my Family Spoerry at its Kinderheim Hebron, learning that arrived unplanned and unorganized, just like much of life. I also learned at school, where facts were deliberately organized and ideas and ideals implanted. But even here, the unexpected sometimes intruded.

High school days and one night

I had passed and looked at the school house and grounds during my first two weeks in Maennedorf, long before that cold winter night. The vacation-silent two-story building, the one closest to the foot path, was my school; the one a bit further west, with three floors, was for the younger kids, those in the elementary grades. The schools, illuminated by the morning sun in my snapshot, starkly sit on the deserted gravelled grounds. No shrub or tree enlivens the foreground, just a cluster of trees, as if merged into one huge umbrella supported by a half dozen poles, shades the gravel between the two buildings. My school-to-be looks neat, minimally adorned. Its severity is softened by shutters paired with each one of the narrowish windows, two on each floor on the east side and three facing north. A short wing, like a dwarf trunk of a capital T, has a narrower than expected front door that leads into the shake-off-the-snow vestibule and divides the north façade into equal halves. Two columns of buff-colored bricks emphasize each corner of the building; a thin strip of bricks parallels and is separated from each column by a few inches of plain wall and two narrow ledges of granite are imbedded in the off-white stucco. The school emanates a classical aura, simple, clean lines; solid, not cheap.

The vestibule opened into a wide hall with facia boards studded with hooks for coats and jackets attached to the walls, at chest height for some, at eye level for me. To the right, against the south wall, a stairway wide enough for a rush of students led past a landing to the second floor where a door to the right opened into a class room.

Tante Erica and Papa and Mama Spoerry had wished me a good start before I walked out the front door early that Monday morning after Easter vacation, the start of the new school year. I then opened the gate, turned left, rounded the corner to the right, crossed the paved road that led into town and scrambled down a grassy embankment, a short cut, being careful not slip and dirty my neatly pressed pants. At the bottom, beyond a little ditch, I turned left, faced downhill and, in less than a quarter hour after I had left home, I was at school. The stroll down this lane took less than a third of the time of my hike to school in Herrliberg.

Another school chapter, so far filled with blank pages, was about to open. Would I have a man or a women teacher? Would he or she be even half as good as Herr

Walder had been in Herrliberg? I would find out very soon.

A few dozen students milled around the yard, clusters of girls well separated from clusters of boys. Being new, knowing no one, I stood clusterless, school pack on my back, surveying the scene. The school bell rang and in we rushed to the class room to the left on the ground floor. How did I know where to rush? I have no idea, but I ended up in the right place. We all sat down in some seat, boys to the right of the center aisle, girls to the left, following the universal unwritten teenage rule of bunching by gender. I sat near the front. When given the choice, I always sat near the front in class rooms, right through university, in a seat where I would not miss a word, spoken, or written on the chalk board, and where the teacher would not miss my raised hand if I thought I had the right answer, a comment that would impress with my knowledge, or a question that sometimes turned out to be dumb, especially in math.

The room was plain, painted off-white, unadorned, no pictures, no decorations, like a Calvinist church, the teacher's table being the pulpit. Suddenly, the door opens; silence; we jump to our feet and in strides - impossible, amazing, fantastic - Lehrer Walder! He spots me in a second. "Werner!" *"Guete Morge, Herr Walder!"* He is as surprised as I am. His smile is as wide as mine must have been. My worries about school dissolve as sugar in hot tea.

Had I known on that first day of school in Mænnedorf what Aunt Berta had written to Uncle Victor a bit more than a month ago, just a week before I had cycled away from Rütibühl, I would have been less cheerful.

> "It is difficult to have to tell you that dear Jakob und Fanny had the same fate as Marta und Martin [Frank; Marta, a cousin of Aunt Berta] .... One just doesn't know whether one will see each other again..... Who shall tell Wernerle? I feel so extremely sorry for the poor guy; he is so attached to his Papa."
>
> (The Bachs, in a postcard, to Victor Bollag, 22 March, 1942.)

No one told "little Werner", anything.

Herr Walder bid us stand along the walls and then alphabetized us by the first letter of our family names into rows and columns, girls in one set, boys in another. One by one we took our seats; I ended up in about the middle column of desks and close enough to the front to not be overlooked. There was just one exception to the pattern; a girl with blah-blond hair, overstuffed cheeks and clothes and thick glasses on her nose, sat in front so she could adequately see the writing on the chalk board.

During our first recess, Herr Walder asked me how I happened to end up in Mænnedorf. He had had no inkling at the start of Easter vacation that I would be leaving Herrliberg at the same time and for the same destination as he did. We were ignorant of each other's moves. As likely as not, he was in military service at the time and we had a substitute. What counted was his presence where I was; we were in school together, he my mentor, I his pupil.

Lehrer Walder and I

Herr Walder taught us languages - German, French and English - geography and history, subjects that easily filtered into my brain.

Lehrer Walder conjured up history as living events, happenings that reached across decades and centuries, actions that had left residues for our own time. He never left any doubt where his sympathies lay. We were Huguenots persecuted by catholic France; we rode with Garibaldi on his quest to unify Italy; we understood how Bismark's welding of princely states into a unified Germany had spawned Hitler's Germany. When Lehrer Walder's passion for history was married to patriotism for his country and ours - never mind I was just a guest in Switzerland - the breath of history suffused the room and caught us up in the rush of emotion. We saw the brave band of men from Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden, the first three cantons, stand in a circle on a rise above the Vierwaldstædtersee, their right hands stretched to the center, swear to free their lands from the oppressive knights more than 600 years before our time. The daring bravery of Wilhelm Tell and his son were not legend, but woven into the flag of Swiss pride and consciousness. The fierce and bloody battles for men's souls between Catholics and Protestants resounded in the class room and helped explain the scars in the social fabric still visible 500 years later. But, no episode was more vivid than Napoleon's retreat from Russia in the white-out winter of 1812.

Swiss men were known as the toughest soldiers of Europe, hardened by the struggle to wrest a living from thin soil on the slopes of steep mountains and in narrow valleys. Swiss mothers and fathers produced more sons than the countryside could support. They needed some work to keep starvation at bay. With no land and no skills other than physical, they hired themselves out as mercenaries to whichever warrior payed them for risking their lives in wars, not for their own homes and freedom, but far from home and for the conquering ambitions of others. Sometimes brother fought brother, for money. When Napoleon swept through Europe, he swept Swiss merceneries along and into the vast plains of Imperial Russia.

We had ridden with Napoleon from obscurity to victory after victory, we knew him as a poor Corsican and then saw him crown himself Emperor and defy the Pope, all brought to life by Lehrer Walder's flair for resurrecting history. One day, we were seated, ready for the next chapter. The door opened, in dragged a limping, shivering soldier clothed in rags, dragging his rifle while mournfully relating the disastrous rout of the French army, the cold, the hunger, the death of thousands. We sat silent; we saw that soldier slowly move from door to window; we were there with him on the white frozen steppe of Russia. The miserable mercenary was none other than Lehrer Walder, hunched over, in his street clothes. His voice, his delivery, his gestures painted the scene indelibly in my mind. No wonder history topped my youthful list of serious lifetime studies.

In geography, Lehrer Walder spread the globe before our eyes and minds; he wanted us to know our planet, our home. With him we crossed Europe and explored the farthest continents. By the time I finished high school, I sketched a map of all the land masses and oceans from memory, knew most of the countries, their capitals and where they were located, the major mountain ranges and rivers. This was no assignment; I just wanted to and could do it. Lehrer Walder made the world mine; history and geography still fire my penchant for travel.

The world that captured my imagination most intensely was, of course, America, my promised land. It also seemed to be Lehrer Walder's favorite. By the time I sat in class at Cooley High in Detroit in 1946, I knew more about the enormous spread of the the United States than most of my American-educated classmates. Lehrer Walder had commiserated with those who lived down the middle of the country, from the Appalachian Range to the Rocky Mountains, from subarctic Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, about their sweaty, stultifying heat of summer and the numbing cold of winter. He explained that these extremes were born of the mountain ranges that extended in the "wrong" direction, north and south; no high east-west barriers to stop the icy northern winds of winter, unlike in Spain, Italy and the Ticino of Switzerland where the Pyrenees and Alps, skyward east-west ranges, keep snow, ice and slush as strangers.

The world of words was no less Lehrer Walder's domain than history and geography. He taught us French so it sounded French, not Schwyzerdüetsch-French and he drilled us in British English with the infernal TH sound, an accent at which my teeth and tongue, trained in German, rebelled for a long time. The French pronunciation I had learned from him, fortified by my visits to the Bollags of Lausanne, garnered me compliments when Joan and I sampled restaurants in Geneva, a half century later, and the foundation of English grammar and vocabulary Lehrer Walder inculcated eased my transition to daily life in English once I had landed in the United States.

Lehrer Walder not only drilled us in French and English grammar and vocabulary, he also told us about the natives' habits. I remember only the parts about food. One day he strode into our class room with an odd object under his left arm. It turned out to be a toaster, a gadget new to all of us. He also brought a loaf of bread and a bread knife. He cut a few slices, put a slice on each hinged door, closed the doors and plugged in the switchless toaster. We stood there amazed as the aroma of heated bread wafted into the room. He cut the hot browned slices into quarters and passed a piece to eight of us. Then more slices until we all had had a taste of what the British eat for breakfast. Some liked this browned crusted bread; I just as soon had mine the normal way, soft center surrounded by protective crust.

During one French lesson, Lehrer Walder opened a white bag and soon an aroma I never had encountered spiced my nostrils. When I saw the source of the odor, I could tell it was cheese, but what kind was it? certainly not Emmenthaler or Gruye`re; it was white with bluish veins all over. He introduced it to us as Roquefort, the queen of cheeses. We each were allowed a crumble, without bread or crackers. Was it ever delicious, unique. Lehrer Walder told us that it was made from sheep's milk in Roquefort in southern France, that the blue streaks were a special kind of mold, that it was aged in caves where the temperature was steady no matter the season, and that we better pronounce it correctly, *roque'for,* if we ever bought some ourselves.

I had to have more of that cheese. So, when I had some Rappen saved and again was in Zurich, I bought 100 grams at a cheese and butter store and savored it right then, straight, sitting on a park bench. Now, at thirteen dollars a pound, genuine Roquefort still is a rare treat.

Herr Walder was a fantastic teacher, but he wasn't perfect. He expected discipline, dedication, hard work finished on time and neatly done. He knew that achieving all of these all the time was asking too much from any of us, but delivering some of them most of the time seemed reasonable to him. One boy who delivered none of them most of the time unnerved him. The boy's skin and hair were almost the same color, sort of a dirty tan and even his rare smile looked stale. His feet were the only part of him that the rest of us admired. They were neither better looking nor worse than those the rest of us sported and neither particularly large nor small. But, were they tough! Almost all of us, boys and girls, disdained shoes during summer. Leather had to be saved during the war years and shoes were expensive. Come fall, one by one we donned shoes before heading to school. Not he; he walked barefoot almost until his feet met the first flakes of snow. That was admirable. He may have been stupid, but to be that tough, to put your feet onto almost frozen ground required fortitude. The poor kid, and he literally was poor, likely the poorest kid in our class, just didn't have much in his head. Not only that, he also was defiant and crude. I suppose he reflected his upbringing, not an allowable excuse, especially defiance; it was unacceptable. So, Herr Walder slapped him in the face and heated his rear with a stick, all to no avail. I did not like it when he beat him; it hurt. Though I knew that he deserved a licking, I felt sorry for him. He seemed so alone, untouchable. He eventually was kicked out of school, likely into a life of dull labor.

Nosy fingers and bloody snow

I could not figure out what the big scandal was that flitted from ear to ear at school one snowy-season morning. As I no longer had skis by the time I parked my bike at the Kinderheim Hebron that April day a year or two earlier, I could not join a ski outing with many of my classmates on Saturday. On Monday, as soon as I got to school: "Did you hear about Franz and Gretl?" asked a hefty girl in classic gossip tone. (I can see the two, but do not remember their names, which is just as well.) No, I had not, but certainly was interested. So the girl told me and a court of nodding boys that the bunch of them were skiing through a snow-covered meadow when they came upon a fence, not high, not buried under snow. All of them removed their skis and tossed them and the poles across the fence. Guys and most of the gals, all in wooly warm sweaters, jackets and ski pants, managed to climb over without trouble, although some of the shorter girls needed a lift, which the young gentlemen gladly provided. "You know what Gretl did? She's so tall, she could easily have climbed over that little fence. But no, she played the little princess and asked Franz to help her across. So, you know how he did it? Instead of helping her climb across, he lifted her up, not with both arms around the waist, but with one hand right between her legs, and high up!!! YOU know where! And, she didn't mind at all! She just laughed." I couldn't quite see what the big deal was, what big thrill there might have been for the two, why the eager revelations. So what? I thought, not because I understood, but because I didn't. I pretended to be shocked and dismissed the puzzle with: "What else would you expect from these two stuck up characters who think they are better than the rest of us?" These two, Gretl and Franz, were two of the aristocrats in school, always well groomed, athletically built, she with long blondish hair, his less blond hair neatly combed with a backward flip in front. Their generally good looks were marred by a built-in sneer for those they considered below them, a sneer that certainly could not have grown out of superior brain power. They were the school jock and jockette.

Franz and Gretl papered over their modest school smarts with crust. One day, I had left the class room for some reason, likely nothing more unusual than going to the toilet. As I turned the corner I heard a rustle; it came from the landing of the staircase, from Frantz and Gretel snuggling close. A glance and then a harder look. Franz' hands were tucked between Gretl's breasts! Not outside her blouse, but inside, under the fabric, next to her skin. Wow! What crust! I grinned and turned to head the other way. Just then the door of the upstairs class room opened and Lehrer Marti stood there, wide-eyed. I couldn't stay to listen to his admonitions; my bladder trumped my nosiness. Neither could I spill this titillating news to any of my buddies because its source would have been clear; if I did, these aristocrats' friends might have exacted revenge.

That was no idle fear. The Donald Trump of our class, not as handsome as he thought he was, muscular, whose nose I had bloodied during one sunny day, and in front of girls at that, still had not avenged himself. As fate would have it, his way to and from school was the same as mine, except he lived further up the hill, in one of the grander houses. Every now and then, on the way home, never on the way to school, he taunted me, challenging me to a fight. I knew better than to accept, and when things started to look serious, friends of mine who trod home the same way, drew 'round me and told him to bug off. And, he did. Then, one winter day, when all was white and big snow banks, freshly covered the night before, lined our path upward, and my friends had left our common path, he and some other aristocrats followed me, at a distance. They kept trailing me and shouting for me stop and fight, else I would be coward. No question, being a coward was preferable to be beaten up for no good purpose. I hurried as fast as I could, but it wasn't easy, uphill on that cold slippery snow, tamped down by now. My pounding heart just managed to keep pace with my legs. Step by step, my pursuers moved their legs just a bit faster than mine would carry me. Then, just before they caught up with me, about two-thirds of the way home, I ducked into a safe haven, into the wide white double door that opened into the very vestibule from where sheltered flights of stairs led up to flats on the second and third floors, the one I had noticed my first week in Mænnedorf. Luckily, a friend of Tanta Erica, a women I barely knew, lived in one of those flats. I didn't care whether she was home or not; I hoped she would not be be. I would have been too embarrassed to tell her why I was where I was or to ask for help. Walking home protected by a women, in front of those guys, would have been just too humiliating. For now, I was safe in the vestibule. No way would my pursuers dare to enter the house of a complete stranger, no more than I would have done. After my heart had slowed to a trot, I walked up one flight of stairs, to the first landing, and looked out the window. My nemeses dared me to come out. I was silent. What to do? I couldn't hang out in here forever. The minutes passed, slowly. Finally, our Donald Trump and his buddies quit shouting and headed up the hill. I left my sanctuary and slowly continued homeward; though knowing full well that I could be ambushed any second, I had to take that risk. No surprise, the gladiators were waiting for me just below the embankment where I would have turned off to head home. I walked on and tried to ignore them, but they blocked my

way.
"Come on, guys, three against one just isn't fair!"
"Shut up and fight! "
I just managed to ditch my backpack before the Donald came at me. I gave it all I had, but that wasn't nearly enough. We both ended up wrestling on the deep, cold bed of snow. This time, it was my nose that bled. When he saw red, he relented; his thirst for revenge had been stilled. He put a shit-ass grin on his face and then he and his buddies left me alone in my misery, the no longer virgin snow splotched with my blood.

I was wiped out. My nose was bleeding, my head ached, my legs wobbled, my ego was crushed. I felt utterly abandoned. I grabbed a handful of clean snow and held it on my forehead and nose so the cold blanket would help stem the bleeding. It worked. I picked up my backpack, slung it over my shoulders, but didn't take my usual shortcut to the Kinderheim; it seemed too much effort to clamber up the embankment in the deep snow. I dragged up the long way, to the path that doubled back and around a curve to home.

At Tante Erica's "What in the world is the matter with you? What happened?" my emotions overwhelmed me. I started to sob uncontrollably, I, a mid-teenage boy. I couldn't say a word. Tante Erica led me to a couch, nudged me down and sat next to me, my head on her shoulders, my tears wetting her sweater. I never had felt so empty before, so abandoned, so hopeless. Why now? Sure, I was punched up and beaten down. Still, nothing serious was wrong with me, nothing that wouldn't be OK by nightfall. Then, when my tears had stopped and my mind had recovered, I grasped why now, on this day.

Not long before my beating, may be a week, or at most two, I had received a card from the International Red Cross. It must have been in the winter of 1944-45, when the German Armies were being squeezed from the East by the Soviets and from the West by the Atlantic Allies, after the first concentration camps had been liberated. The form message, with the names of my parents typed into the blank space, told me that, so far, no trace of them had been found. On that day, I took the news calmly. After all, "so far" left room for hope. But, on the afternoon of the fight, when my body and I had been defeated, the words "so far" had evaporated and my whole being realized that never again would I see my father and my mother. Never. Ever. It just was too much. Nothing but loss. It was too much to bear stoically.

It was on that couch, that winter afternoon, that Tante Erica listened, hugged, consoled, sympathized, reassured, tried to heal. It was in the dim light, between the last rays of the sun through the window and the glow of lamps, that Tante Erica incontrovertibly transformed herself, just by being herself, into my anchor. From that day on, she no longer was *in loco parentis*, but *parentis de facto*. She accepted this status instinctively, without words, as silently as I had bestowed the title on her. Undoubtedly, it was this transformation that caused her to sign her letters to me, even into my early adulthood in the United States, *Mami*. I never responded in kind; I just could not. Until the last report of survivors of the carnage had faded away, years after VE Day, I retained a glimmer of hope that my real Mama and my Papa might yet reappear.

Sun, fun, facts and what a night!

Schulreisen, school outings, one each year of high school, were the treasure days of the school year; no one wanted to miss them. They were a mix of facts and fun under the sun. If you know your country and its beauty, you will love it was the theory and practice. These trips stayed within a day's train-plus-hiking distance from Mænnedorf, going and coming, in years one and two. During the senior year, we stayed overnight, away from home. These explorations were not just gates to the appreciation of the beauty of nature and love of country; they also brought to life lessons we had absorbed at our desks in school. Lehrer Walder told us about the forces and calling cards of glaciation that generated many Swiss lakes and the forested and meadowed moraines that contain them; he recited the names of flowers as we discovered them next to the trail and the danger of their extinction if people kept picking them; he talked about geology and the upheavals of our earth over the eons as we admired the scenery. He made all of nature live. I still have a jagged little pyramid of rock, light tan and fine grained, on which I wrote in indelible ink: "Weissenstein" on one face and "17. VIII. 43." on another. It's a memento of a day when Lehrer Walder took us on a narrow trail in the Jura mountains to show us outcroppings and horizontal layers of rocks, the tilts and bends into which others had frozen. I certainly don't remember any details, but these lessons out in the fresh air come to mind whenever I see the regal, sheer, many-hued walls of the canyon of the Kings River east of Fresno, the brain-like folds of layers laid bare by the cut for a now abandoned road across the Grapevine of the Tehachapi Mountains, or the terraces exposed by road cuts and streams in the Bluegrass Country of Kentucky. The specific lessons have vanished, but they opened my eyes and mind to the secrets and fascinations of nature.

A year earlier, on a summer day in 1942, with much of the world in mortal turmoil and my parents already enslaved in Poland, I looked out of the window of my room, soon after dawn, down toward the school house. Great, we're going! The chubby white cross in the field of red, the Swiss national flag, fluttered from the top of the mast next to the school. The weather would be fair, the trip would not have to be postponed because of rain. Without phones in many homes and no local radio station, the flag was our signal. It could be seen from just about anywhere in Mænnedorf and from no place better than from my perch. I rushed through my morning needs and then down into the kitchen to tell Mama Spoerry that we would be going. While I filled myself with an ample breakfast, she fixed my carry-along lunch, rye bread and cheese; a lunch without cheese was almost unthinkable. If luck was with me, I might have had a bar of chocolate, preferably bittersweet. Such a treat, tucked between two slices of rye bread, turned into an exquisite pleasure as the chocolate melted in my mouth and suffused the bread as I chewed. Ah, sweet remembrance of indulgences past. Since this lunch would really be my Mittagessen, potato salad perked up just with cider vinegar, oil and diced onions was *de rigeur*. Mama Spoerry nearly filled the aluminum box I had brought from home for carry-along meals. I slid on the lid and loaded the box and sandwiches into my backpack. We would get milk and water somewhere along our hike. I thanked Mama Spoerry, rushed a good bye to Tante Erica and Papa Spoerry, swept through the gate, scooted down the embankment and joined my equally excited classmates to hurry and chat past our school, through the underpass below the tracks and then up to the railroad station.

Lehrer Walder already stood among a cluster of students. His bald pate glistened in the early sun as he checked off names as we and others arrived. A bright light in the near distance, a perfunctory toot, the train stopped and we piled into the non-smoking compartment that had been reserved for us in one of the third class carriages. We flung our backpacks up into the luggage rack and, at Lehrer Walder's command, calmed down as the train started moving eastward, toward Stæfa, so he could explain to us what we would see and to lay down rules of conduct: Stay on the trail and stay together; no sneaking off during rest stops, racing ahead or dragging behind. He had no need to tell us not to litter; dropping ones discards on trail or street was unthinkable.

We passed the little Isle of Ufenau, where the gentle waves of Lake Zurich caressed its shores, stopped in Rapperswil, headed south across the bridge between the large lower and small upper portion of the lake, and again turned eastward. Soon we skirted the south shore of the Wallensee and, before long, may be within an hour from when we started, arrived in Wallenstadt, a little town at the east end of the lake.

From Wallenstadt we hiked up through meadows on rocky paths, past *Alpenrosen*, a species of rhododendron, and gentian - no, no Edelweiss. I had seen pictures of Alpenrosen and gentian, but the real flowers, the intense wine red of the one and rich blue of the other under the unhibited sun, amid gray rocks and stone rubble, were unforgettably gorgeous.

As we stood admiring these alpine wonders, Lehrer Walder told us in a teen-brain-penetrating message that we were to never even think about picking any of these flowers, that they belong all the people and that they were one reward for sweating from the valley up to the mountain. The trail steepened and then, within a few dozen more steps, while my feet still moved below the crest, a vista opened before me: breathtakingly beautiful scenery. The views from Rütibühl and from my room in Mænnedorf were panoramas, distant views, without detail. Here I was at the very edge of close-up grandeur. I was not the only one who stood in silence to let this apparition sink in. In the foreground, a small alpine lake, quiet and serene, mirror smooth, reflected the surrounding flowered hills nearest the shore and, toward the center of the lake, on the north shore, the rugged, jagged, nearly vertical grey wall of the Churfirsten range. What a sight it was! Picture-postcard Switzerland, live. We had reached the goal of our hike, the Seebenalpsee.

We also were hungry by now. Lehrer Walder found us a ledge where we would trample the fewest flowers with our boots as we settled down to our Mittagessen below an azure sky without a cloud in sight. I opened my backpack, pulled out the box with the potato salad, a spoon and started to eat, as did Herr Walder and the rest of the kids. Some of the others already had finished whatever they had carried up the mountain when I closed the now empty box and pulled out my bread and cheese.
"How can a little guy like you eat all that food?"
"No, trouble at all; I was hungry."
"I couldn't finish all my potato salad, would you like what's left?"
"Sure. Thanks."
And that is how I got my reputation as a chow hound. As one of my less delicate classmates phrased it: "You'd eat anything as long as there isn't any shit on the spoon handle." From then on, on any school outing, I was invited to help lighten the homeward load of classmates whose mothers had overestimated their offsprings' capacity.

Then, a surprise. Just a few weeks after our hike to this tranquil spot, the "Gelbe Heft", my favorite source of information about the world, carried a photo, in sepia tones, of the very scene that had greeted us at the end of the trail. I scissored it out, flattened it between pages of my photo album, and have kept it as a souvenir of a wonderful day, now almost six decades past.

THE big event of the senior year in high school was not a prom, we never even heard of such a bash, but the overnight school excursion, when fun and learning intertwined from sunrise to sunset and over again, when the ties to home were stretched, when the only adult eyes were those of Herr Walder, when we tested our legs and our maturity.

On 23 August, 1944, the Swiss flag again fluttered high over the school in the early morning sun. No one was missing when the train pulled into the Mænnedorf station at about six thirty. We all, girls and boys, were freighted down with backpacks, bulging with food, drink and other essentials, and one hand carried a hiking cane; no one set out on a serious hike in the mountains without one. Classy canes, like one my father carried, are hand-turned, carved and rugged looking, ready for work up a trail; simple canes, like mine, were machine-turned and smooth. All had curved handles and steel tipped points. My mother's precious Voigtlander bellows camera dangled from my right shoulder.

We again headed to Rapperswil and crossed the bridge, except this time, our train kept rushing southward, past Zug to Luzern, along the Vierwaldstædtersee, along the holy ground where the Swiss confederation was founded in 1291. In Luzern, we changed from our express to the Brünigbahn, a mountain railway that took us slowly past the Sarnersee over the Brünigpass toward Brienz on the Brienzersee. Few, if any of us had travelled through this valley before; our eyes hung out the windows to admire the green pastures dotted with cows, hamlets, church spires watching over villages and the rugged ranges and peaks that towered over them all.

The day was still in its first half when we clambered off the train in Meiringen on the Aare, the youthful mountain stream that feeds the Brienzersee. We hiked a couple of kilometers southeastward, I next to the prettiest girl in our class, when opportune, to the Aareschlucht, the ravine cut by the Aare through solid rock, a ravine not much wider than the outstretched arms of any of us. We carefully held on to the railing of the damp board walk some brave men had suspended years ago above the raging, fuming torrent of water so we, and many before and after us, could admire and be impressed by this work of unimpeded nature. Over the roar of the stream we heard Lehrer Walder's stentorian voice tell us how the force of the water, augmented by gravel and stones in its rush, had gouged out this canyon over the eons. Another vivid history of a special spot on earth. How could one, how could I, not love a country with such spectacular sights,one settled by people who made it possible for us, for me, to see these wonders?

Soon after we had emerged from the dimness and spray of the crevice we delved into our home-packed lunches. Stomachs satisfied, we reversed directions and rode another train to Brienz.

Brienz, then a little town, clusters at the foot of the Brienzer Rothorn that peaks at about 5,500 feet above the lake. Not even Herr Walder expected us to hike up that steep climb and reach the crest before sunset. The Swiss, ever mindful of the comfort of tourists, had built a cog railway from the town to just below the summit of the mountain. It was August, the height of the Schulreisen and of the general tourist seasons. Foreign visitors were absent during this last summer before VE Day, so the Swiss, who could not travel abroad, enjoyed their own spectacular country. The train was little, a few bright red open-windowed cars, each with space for at most two dozen people. A black steam engine, as if escaped from a children's book, pulled the train. We rushed forward, but there wasn't enough space for the adult tourists who had waited in line ahead of us and for all of us, too. We had to retreat and wait for the sister train to descend as the near one rose. No way would Herr Walder let us split into goers and waiters. After all, he was the one and only chaperone to oversee us; he carried the full responsibility for us teenagers, some of whom never had slept in a strange bed before.

We see our half of the train set creep down the last slope, disappear behind trees and houses and then reappear in front of us, at the station. We pile in and sit down. A blast from the steam whistle, the cogs engage, and the engine starts to puff, up and up. It seemed as if we were climbing almost vertically as I sat facing downhill, the roofs of Brienz and its namesake lake spreading before me. The ascent was like a passage through a layer cake: Pastures with cows gave way to a stretch of forest that thinned into short, scattered, mountain-rugged trees as we rose toward the tree line; then a band of hunkered-down grass transitioned into a skin of alpine tundra over rock as we approached the nearly naked crest. Lehrer Walder was just as much at home explaining differences in vegetation generated by differences in soil and climate as about the maze of German grammar or the progression of history.

The higher we climbed the more expansive became the view. To the south and east, the rugged peaks of the Bernese Alps, their steepest slopes and narrow edges exposed rock, the nooks and crannies still glistening white in the August sun. And, most brilliant of all, as they reflected the sun in the western sky, lay the bowls of pure white snow and ice cradled below the arcs of rocky precipices. These cirques birth glaciers as the white mass expands downward under its own weight, explained Lehrer Walder.

The sharp alpine peaks, saws, precipices, ridges and cirques, these ancient but geologically young effusions of the earth, embody mountains for me. How disappointed I was when our puffing Chevrolet labored up the Trail Ridge Road over the Rocky Mountains in 1953, on our way to California. To my eyes, these were not mountains; they were oversize moraines, smooth, broad backs peppered with boulders. What a joy when we saw the Sierra Nevada and crossed Donner Pass! These were real mountains, like the mountains of my youth - jagged, rough, sharp-edged, fascinating in their wild beauty.

The track levelled out, a toot, and the ride was at an end, may be a hundred feet lower than the peak of the Brienzer Rothorn and a quarter mile from our goal, a stone-faced hotel that seemed to have been extruded by the mountain itself, where we would crash for the night. Our reserved rooms turned out to be one dormitory with iron cots and thin mattresses for the girls and, for us boys, a stretch of equally thin mattresses, one shoved almost next to the other, on the floor along the wall of the corridor across from the girls' room. A folded blanket or two lay at the foot of each mattress; our pillows would be whatever piece of clothing we didn't wear at night. We boys didn't like it that we were relegated to the hall where guests commuted to the bath room and back, along the narrow lane between our mattresses and the wall opposite our feet, while the girls, those tender flowers, had their "private" room. Nothing we could do about but grumble; nearly every square foot of public floor space in the hotel was mattress land.

We each dumped our backpacks and hiking canes on our so-called beds, mine among friends from the class proletariat, a few mattresses from the door to the girls' domain, toward the bath room. The fellows who imagined themselves to be aristocrats had claimed the spots near the forbidden door with a ripply yellow glass inset that kept curious eyes out.

By now, enticing odors of cooking food started to waft through the hall. It was time to feed the masses. A wave of noisy chatter greeted us in the huge dining room with expansive windows set into walls of stone as we rushed in to find the tables reserved for us from Mænnedorf. We lined up along the trough, piled our trays high with food and filled our empty innards, talking about what I don't know, we teasing the girls, the girls teasing us, all of us having a great time. As usual in any group of two or more, I was the last to finish. My mother had insisted I chew thoroughly; that now ingrained habit, added to the quantity I ate and the amount I talked, tested the patience of the others at the table. But, no one left until my plate was clear. Was it politeness or just curiosity as to whether or not I really could demolish that pile of food in front of me? Finally, I was done and full and we headed outside where the evening sun bathed the mountain ranges with a golden glow while the deep valleys already had faded into dusk.

Several of us, including the girl I admired, wandered up the trail to the very tip of the horn from where the world lay before us; our view was nearly circular. Mountains, valleys, hills, lakes like black panes of glass, the edges peppered here and there by the glow of lights in villages. We sat on a rounded ledge, in the cool evening air and talked little. The panorama spoke volumes, silently. The first stars dotted the pure sky as we wandered back down to the inn, I tired from the long day, but elated.

We threaded our way through the aisle between wall and mattresses to our respective sacks, exchanged good nights with the girls who then vanished behind the door to their room. We boys settled down, but energy still buzzed about in talk and laughter. Finally, at about eleven, Lehrer Walder materialized from somewhere down the hall and told us to be quiet - adult guests were here, too - and knocked on the door of the girl's room to shush them before he disappeared into the dimness of the long hall, now lighted only by a bulb near the bathroom.

I finally dropped off to sleep. Then, at some ungodly hour, a racket. The stinging voice of Herr Walder; a door slammed shut; bodies moved. What's happening? For some reason, whether on the way to the bathroom or out of suspicion born of experience, Herr Walder had moseyed into our mattress land. Even in the dimness he had noticed that two pads were empty, save for the backpacks where heads should have rested. They were the spots right across the door to the harem. It had taken him only seconds to figure out where the missing bodies might be. He had knocked on the door, it had become unlocked; he had switched on the light and instantly spotted the miscreants, each one flat under a girl's bed. By the time I came fully to, Herr Walder's head, fiery red, seemed ready to burst from fury and indignation. The louts had betrayed his trust!
"Out!!"
The two shuffled to their pads.
Then, silence, the silence of a tomb, except for about ten boys breathing.

The August sun already had brightened the window in the door to the girls' room when Herr Walder roused us. "Stand up!", directed at the two sneaks. Who would they be, but the two most conceited of the aristocrats, their sneers now hidden by downcast eyes and pouting mouths.

A wave of *Schadenfreude* swept across my mind. Those arrogant asses had been caught. How nice.

Herr Walder opened the door and ordered the girls into a half circle. Freezing the two erstwhile hostesses into immobility with his eyes, he spit out the questions:
"Did you invite them in to your room?"
A near-sobbing "No."
"Were they in your beds?"
A frightened, emphatic "No!"
"Why didn't you report them to me?"
Silence. Heavy silence.
Herr Walder did not persist.

He turned to the two perpetrators in pants:
"You will not speak to any one, except me, the rest of the day. No one will speak to you. Is that understood?" His eyes canvassed his subdued charges. We knew the "understood" meant all of us, each one.
A *sotto voce* chorus of "*Ja.*"
Nailing the two with his penetrating eyes: "You will walk behind everyone else, directly in front of me. Is that clear?" Two heads nodded.

"Everybody ready! Breakfast will be in 15 minutes. We have to get going."

The tenseness broke as we rushed to the bathroom, soon relieved in more than one way. No one, but no one talked to the two outcasts. No one acknowledged their presence. Few of us had liked them anyway.

Breakfast, including Rœsti, the delicious roasted potato pieces that transcend class and age in Switzerland, was subdued. The commotion of the night still cast a shadow over the brilliant morning that shone through the windows of the dining room.

Stomachs fortified, we donned our backpacks, grabbed our hiking sticks, most of them now festooned with Brienzer Rothorn souvenir metal tags. I
had to forego this memorabilium; a picture post card was cheaper. I had to save my money for developing the pictures in my camera. We assembled at the trailhead to pose for a photo of all of us mountaineers. The two outcasts, glum of face, sit in front, on the ground. A few girls and some boys sit on a bench and the rest of us, most with smiling faces, are balancing our bottoms on a railing or standing, our necks craned to make sure our faces would not be blocked by someone elses' head or hair. My grin stretches from ear to ear as my bushy-haired head is framed on my right by the loudest-mouthed girl of the class, overly endowed and generally ample, and on my left by a soft-faced, almost shy, slim blonde. And way back, smiling above the rest of us, the girl whose sight speeded my pulse. No question, she outshone all of the girls, her lips, her smile, her hair, her figure. But, surveying the photo now, nearly 60 years later, I am amazed that most of the girls looked pretty in one way or another.

Time to hit the trail. The sunlight over the grand views quickly dissipated the pall of the night as we passed the peak where we had sat last night, a romantic spot, with romance mainly in my head. The downhill to Brünig, where we would catch the train home, was relaxed for all of us, except for Herr Walder and his two silenced charges. Those of us in front had plenty of distance between this trio and us to resurrect the excitement of the night during the four-hour hike. I wasn't the only one who gloated over the humiliation of the misbehaving fools. Very satisfying.

I asked someone to take a snapshot of a quintet of us boys as we posed on a bridge over a creek. On the left, next to the railing, stands a fellow who I barely remember, with a cap on his short-shorn head. He wears a smile, a white shirt, walking shorts down to his knees and holds a hiking stick in his hands, just like the rest of us. Next to him stands Fritz Kaiser, one of my friends and one of the scholars of our class. His head is covered with a knit cap and, in keeping with his fastidiousness, from his buttoned shirt collar emerges a neckerchief slipped through a ring of some sort. The middle is taken by a boy taller than the rest of us and more gangly and awkward than anyone else in the class. To my right, Victor, the class brain, wearing glasses, just like the awkward guy, is talking to me. I am the shortest of the crew. My bulging backpack stuffed with clothes and food sticks out from my back. My pants are held up with suspenders and a belt; on my feet I wear sturdy walking shoes. The other eight feet all are in boots built for hiking, dusty just like my shoes. I am bootless, having outgrown the ones I had and waiting to ask Aunt Jenny for a new pair closer to winter, when they would become essential. My plain socks stop just above my ankles; the others' woolen hiking socks reach almost to their knees, the way they were supposed to. None of these minor deprivations bothered me. I had been able to join a Schulreise, to view the world from the top of a mountain, to hike in forest and through lush meadows as I had done with my parents, to hear and feel the rush and spray of the Aare through its gorge, to ride a train, to have fun with friends, all without a thought of the struggles beyond the Swiss borders and the fate of my parents. These indeed were two grand days for me.

These two joyous days preceded by just a bit more than 11 months the cataclysm that changed the world, the incineration of Hiroshima by an atomic bomb. A week or two after the indelible mushroom cloud rose skyward over the crumpled city and vaporized bodies, long after our Brienzer Rothorn adventure, out of nowhere, Victor, who always had the answers in math class and who never walked barefoot to school, unlike the rest of us, told some of us, out in the school yard during a recess, that the bombs that subdued Imperial Japan were as nothing compared to what he called the ultimate bomb. The rest of us boys listened, but didn't have a clue to what he meant. He patiently explained that it would involve hydrogen and a release of energy that defied imagination. He, in effect, had anticipated the hydrogen bomb. I have no idea how Victor came upon that revelation, but the strangeness of the idea makes it cling to my memory long after that school boy insight has been transformed into abysmal potential reality.

The night of little sleep, the hike from peak to valley and the steady click-clack of the train wheels as they rolled over expansion gaps in the rails, all combined to glaze over and then shut the eyes of many of us. We had admired the scenery on our way out; there was no point in trying to fight lassitude on the way home. The train pulled into Mænnedorf late in the afternoon. After a chorus of *"Ciao"*!, the universal Italian Hi! and Good bye!, we scattered to our homes and suppers. Tired as I was, I did manage to regale those at the table with tales of our adventures before I hit my mattress, beat and happy. But, I spilled not one word about the night-time escapade up on the Brienzer Rothorn; Mama Spoerry would have been shocked and Papa Spoerry would have launched a tirade about rotten youth. The story stayed in the bottle until only Tante Erica's ears were close by, sometime that weekend. I knew she would lap up the story, the names of the guys, the names of the girls, every detail I knew. Besides, I had to tell it to *somebody*.

These school trips were a lark, but not only; our brains also were supposed to be engaged. Herr Walder expected us to connect what he had taught us in class before the trip to what he had pointed out on the train to Brienz, in the Aare Gorge, on the cog-wheeled climb to the peak and on the hike down into the valley, history, geography, geology, the work of glaciers and rivers and the changes in vegetation from valley to mountain peak. I lapped up this sort of stuff; I was fascinated by it all. I looked forward to the next day of school; I knew I could answer just about any question Lehrer Walder might ask, especially about history and geography.

Flying numbers and flat notes

Too bad Herr Walder wasn't the only teacher we needed. We also had to learn arithmetic and geometry, subjects for which my enthusiasm and talent were distinctly limited. Whatever limited enthusiasm and talent I did have were dampened by our instructor, whose teaching lacked both. He, now nameless, was my first teacher in public school whose only memorable attributes were a stifling dullness and slicked down brown hair with a part on the left. He was born old. He was a cipher, a zero in personality, who taught numbers. He entered the room; we stood up; we sat down; he pulled a few notecards out of the pocket of his sports jacket, all in silence. Cards organized, he started to scribble on the blackboard and talk. Once, when I had to solve a problem up front, chalk in hand, a demand that invariably raced my pulse and made my nose sweat, I noticed that his cue cards were yellowed and varnished with finger smudges along the upper edge. No doubt about it, he had been using these same cards, year after year, ever since he started teaching, may be two decades earlier. Math did not change, so why shouldn't he regurgitate the same litany, year after year?

I'm surprised he didn't put himself to sleep with his drone. With no eyes on us, whispers, funny faces by the clowns of the class and passed notes criss-crossed the room. Then, suddenly, Mr. Zero wheeled about to spot the miscreants. Whoever was caught had to rise and remain standing the rest of the period or until we had to solve some problems on paper, which required rear on seat and paper and pencil on desk top. In such an emergency, the perpetrator had to sit in the last row, in an empty seat. Only one seat was empty; all the rest were occupied. By alphabetical chance, that one vacant seat, half of a double desk, languished next to a pretty girl with a ready smile and light brown curly hair threaded into two well-disciplined braids. Such punishment, for a boy to have to sit next to her! I either was too obedient or too fast, so I was consigned to that seat only once. Ah, such missed opportunities!

Punishment had no silver lining if Mr. Zero's end of patience transformed itself into sputtering rage. Then, a tongue lashing found its exclamation point with an assignment of anywhere from 10 to 20 math problems piled on top of the regular array that had to be solved and turned in the next day. The severity of such an explosion calmed the class for several days. I was willing to risk having to slide into the seat next to the cute girl, but having to figure out 10 or more extra problems, perish the thought; I had enough trouble with my regular long divisions, memorizing the squares of numbers up to 20 and, especially with square roots. To extract the square root of, let's say 2537, 10,658, or any other such number, just with a sheet of paper, pencil, eraser and my head was strenuous mental weight lifting.

This negative paragon of an educator had the thoroughly annoying habit of simultaneously pointing at his victim and spitting out problems to wich we were expected to instantly have the answers, like 15 times 12, or 13 squared. Any day-time reverie went out the window during those sessions. Any silent hesitation or ah...ah... meant you did not know the answer and had garnered a duly recorded demerit. Then he stabbed the air in the direction of the next victim, who, if smart and alert, had started to figure out the answer while the first one stuttered. If the second kid also failed, then he asked for volunteers to raise their hands, mine rarely among them. Even when I did know the answer, or at least thought I did, and raised my hand, he often ignored my signal. Maybe my contempt for his lazy teaching had seeped into my face and was unmistakable. I hated those machine-gun question sessions; even when I knew the answers, the forced concentration strained my brain. I do have to admit I eventually learned to juggle rather than just jumble numbers in my head, at times a very handy facility.

Spitting out numbers I learned, but spewing out musical notes, not just sounds, was hopeless. I still hated singing, just as I had at school in Herrliberg. Not singing *per se*, that I enjoyed, especially to myself, but having to sing in class, under duress, was a pain. Although I could sing loudly and enunciate clearly, I held a tune like a sieve holds water and I could no more hit a specific note than I could shoot a bird in flight. Memorizing poetry, whether spoken or set to music, was one of my hangups; the lines just would not stay in place. I had an awful time remembering the words beyond the first stanza; I always was a fraction of a second behind everyone else so I could listen to them for a clue to the next line. But sing I must, so decreed Mr. Zero. I decided to compromise, unilaterally. It took him two or three lessons to figure out that I was just mouthing the words and not producing a sound.

"Sing, Werner, sing!!" and I sang till he looked elsewhere. When he did, I would wiggle my ears, not in tempo, just *ad hoc*, which would crack up those who saw my mobile ears and stop the words on the way out of their mouths. By the time teacher turned his head, I sang full throat. He did catch me evenutally and gave me hell and a C; why not an even lower grade, I have no idea. With my ears immobilized, I started acting out the sense of the song, as I had in Herrliberg. With *"Guten Abend, gute Nacht...",* Brahms' famous lullaby, I closed one eye - the other one watched out for the conductor - folded my arms and let my head droop. For Christmas songs, I formed my hands into a halo over my head. One time, even Mr. Zero couldn't help laugh at my antics. The spell had been broken. He stopped insisting I sing and we got along much better from then on, whether the lesson was the tempo of songs or extracting square roots.

I really did try to learn musical notation; after all, an incompetent voice would not serve as an excuse for scrambled notes on paper; there was no way to cutesy myself around exams. This Do Re Mi ... business was a struggle and I forgot all of it as soon as I no longer was forced to remember what the little flags and full and empty circles meant. What I did enjoy was the perky ditty that was passed on from one generation of school kids to the next. This is how it goes in Swiss-German dialect: *"Do re mi fa sœlleli / Geisse scheisset Bœlleli"* (Do re mi fa sol / goats shit little balls.). So much for music in school.

Indulgent referee

Herr Marti, of short, blond curly hair, stocky built, ready smile, also kind and forgiving, taught art, not one of my talents, and gym. He also minded us on the playground during recesses. Like boys everywhere, we argued, pushed and shoved and sometimes wrestled when words would not do or when girls were watching. One time, a guy taller and tougher than I, which didn't take much, and I heatedly argued about whatever it was and then got physical. Somehow or other, I was quicker than he expected, or just lucky, and managed to lock his head under my arm and squeeze his neck. I wasn't about to let go, because I knew that if I did, he could pulverize me. Just as I noticed that it was the other guy's nose that was bleeding, not mine, Herr Marti tapped me on the shoulder: *"Gnueg!"* .-Enough! I let go. "Shake hands." We did, I with more satisfaction than the other guy and relieved that Herr Marti had come to my rescue. I looked around; seemingly everyone, including Herr Marti and most of the girls, had watched us all along. They were amazed that I, the little guy who just recently had blown into town, had bested Mr. Handsome, muscular, conceited, the Donald Trump of our class.

I still was worried. Fighting was strictly *verboten* on school grounds. What punishment would Herr Marti mete out? Would there be a note in my report card, the worst possible outcome? Not to worry; though his mouth said "Don't do it again", his eyes whispered "Well done". What a relief! I never again fought on the school grounds, but it sure felt good to be a hero, even if for only ten minutes. No wonder I came to like Herr Marti.

I wasn't a weakling, but muscle boy I was not. I had inherited my mother's physique, not my father's sports figure. Work was the only muscle builder I knew, but, unlike in Herrliberg, I was spared such workouts here in Mænnedorf. I now enjoyed the easy life, and enjoy it I did. I made my bed, dusted my room every now and then and shined my shoes once a week, none a muscle builder. Doing push-ups by myself or lifting weights never entered my head; I knew of no one else who did. Lehrer Marti saw my need and silent wish to build up some muscles. He suggested I join the *Jugendriege*, a youth sports club. My body certainly needed to add some beef to my bones so I could outgrow being a 50 kg target for bullies, if I was that heavy. Sports was the way to go. So I joined.

Budding athlete, bulging eyes

The Jugendriege was no exclusive club; any boy could join. All we had to provide was white cotton sport shorts, white sleeveless cotton knit shirts, white socks and gym shoes. Since I had to have all these for phys ed in school anyhow, I didn't have to explain to Aunt Jenny why I would need these duds; I just told her that I joined. Asking for anything extra, stuff that even modest kids could take for granted, required a production, questions, answers, and, finally, a yes. I hated these inquisitions about seemingly simple matters.

About 30 of us met to practice on Saturday mornings with local athletes as our coaches and mentors. Some of us were tall, some short, some natural athletes, some, like I, were not. The only two faces I remember as I look at a photo from 1942 at the ruins of of the fortress Old Wædenswil on the other side of Lake Zurich, are a fellow with a friendly smile, short, stiff blond hair and more athletic ability in his short body than I ever hoped to attain. The other one is Mario, my friend and wrestling partner. Both of us enjoyed wrestling, the one sport in which I felt confident. We often entertained our classmates during dry weather recesses with our matches in the sand box that otherwise caught shotput balls and flying bodies in long jump. Our buddies cheered us on until Mario pinned me or I pinned him. Then, when the back-to-classes bell rang, we shook hands and the sand out of our hair and clothes and were ready to again sit still for a while.

Those Saturday mornings were a mixture of anticipation and trepidation. I anticipated not doing well and was worried that I might somehow hurt myself. First, I didn't like to get hurt; second, if had needed a doctor, it would have been one big hassle to explain to Aunt Jenny the whys and wherefores.

Calisthenics, gymnastics, and track events, none of which took much space or expensive equipment, were our sports. I knew I was a bit clumsy; still, I was amazed how out of sync I was in calisthenics. When all arms were upright, mine still were on their way, when the rest of the boys had theirs stretched left, mine still were vertical. I always seemed to be one move behind the coach's beat. Embarassing. I wanted to do better, to live up to my father's example.

My incompetence shone at the end-of-summer competition in front of a crowd of townspeople, the parents of most of the boys; I had earned a charitable 5.0 out of 10 possible points in calisthenics. The parallel bars gave me a lift. I was no whiz, but I managed to do all the required moves, not with élan, but at least recognizable. Even under public pressure, I managed to "walk" with my hands, eyes forward and legs dangling parallel. One exercise tensed my stomach. I don't remember the exact move, but if one wasn't careful or agile, all that sensitive cargo between the legs could get squeezed and then hurt like hell. Not only that, but some guys less clumsy than I and lacking charity equated this kind of misadventure with hilarity. Doubly damn annoying. But, nobody laughed at me at the final event, the long jump, my favorite; I soared far enough to earn a 9.5. Even with that enviable score, my overall performance in seven disciplines scraped the bottom: I came in 29th out of 31 or 32. Not my father's son, for sure.

Not giving up was one of the lessons my father had taught me. A year later, I earned a 8.5 in calisthenics and came in 9th overall, a jump of 20 places. Not bad at all for a year's effort. I was no champion, but pleased with myself when I showed off my then and now prized certificate to the Spoerrys and my relatives in Zurich.

We boys in the Jugendriege were expected to help out with whatever needed to be done during the annual *Sportsfest* when local men competed for prestige and prizes. We measured, we kept time, we made sure rosin was available for the gymnasts. Whatever my job was, I happened to be where the men changed from street clothes into their gym shirts and shorts. There was no locker room, just a curtain between the storage area and the gym. I had never seen jockstraps before nor naked men. (One did not gawk from side to side standing at a urinal. Besides, modesty decreed to leave an empty one on each side, when feasible.) The supports were interesting, the other amazing. Would my endowment ever grow that large and enshrouded with curly hair? Boy, did I have a lot of growing up to do! Unlike with sports, where practice improves, I could think of nothing that I could do to speed the race to manhood. Time would tell. Some answers just had to wait.

I really appreciated my livened arm muscles after school one day.

She wore unruly braids and freckles punctuated her nasty face. It really irritated me; it paraded her ignorance, crudeness, and ill-tempered disposition. She took offense at anything but liked to dish out epithets at others, especially me. Why me? May be she sensed my dislike of her. She lived somewhere in the opposite direction of where I did. One afternoon I had some errand in the village after school and our paths ran parallel. I was a bit ahead of her, but she hurried along and caught up with me; we walked silently, a few feet apart; I looked straight ahead and tried to ignore her. We barely had entered the dusky tunnel under the railroad tracks when she suddenly slung an epithet at me, what I don't remember. I was startled. My pent-up anger burst open and I slapped her hard across the face. I was as stunned as she was at my daring. Boys don't hit girls. Period. So surprised was she, she didn't even try to fight with me, a fight I might have lost, because she was strong, tough and outweighed me. She grunted something and ran off, ahead of me. I had stood up to a bully! It only was a girl, but still. She never again bothered me.

She of the freckles I learned to ignore, but no way could I, would I have wanted to, ignore the prettiest girl in class.

Hearthrob

In a picture of the entire class on the Brienzer Rothorn, that memorable school outing, she smiles from the last row as we sit on benches or stand behind them. It's a warm, natural smile with her full lips slightly parted. Her skin never was winter pale; it radiated the permanent tan engendered by her Mediterranean heritage. She was just a bit shorter than I, pleasantly plump, which reflected her personality, relaxed and cheerful. She - now nameless, as so many from my early life; I'll call her Herzli - also was a good student. I liked everything about her, but it was her hair that fascinated me, a crown of the most beautiful chestnut brown hue I had ever beheld. It seemed to glow from within, even on rainy days. It was gorgeous. Herzli parted it on the left and gathered it in full-bodied braids directed over the shoulders to either side of her bosom. She seemed to like that I liked her.

Dating for high schoolers hadn't yet been invented, at least not in Mænnedorf; not even handholding at recess. and social telephone calls were out of the question. Phone calls just were not part of the scene, especially for me; they were a luxury; each one counted toward the bill. We were confined to express our mutual admiration in smiles and small talk at school and during an enchanted early winter Saturday afternoon selling postage stamps.

Postage stamps are an art form in Switzerland. The Swiss issued then and issue now the most consistently attractive, exquisitely designed and carefully printed stamps of any country. Some of these stamps not only pay for postage, some also help raise funds for charities by way of a surcharge. Each denomination differs from the others in design and color in any one year, but all reflect a specific theme, scenery, heroes, art, sports, science and others. By far the favorite charity attached to the sale of stamps was PRO JUVENTUTE, for youth. These special stamps were sold not only at post offices, but house to house, by youth, by high school kids like my hearthrob and I.

The PRO JUVENTUTE stamps always were issued a few weeks before Christmas, when people's charitable instincts presumably peaked. We students were assigned routes and paired up to fan out over town and into Uetikon, the next village downlake, which lacked a high school. A racing heart boldens the spirit. When we lined up, Herzli and I stepped forward together and asked that we be paired. The lady glanced up at us, our cheeks flushed, smiled a knowing smile and entered us on the same line. Not only that, she even awarded us the extra plum of "having to" trod all the way to Uetikon, to where we could be together the longest. Talking about being tickled blushing pink!

On that unforgotten Saturday we met at school and lined up with the rest of the volunteers to collect our stamps. We, like each other pair, the others mostly unisex, received a hundred stamps, signed for them and set out on our route, snow below our feet, on roofs, lawns, trees, a Swiss fairy tale landscape. We chatted as we headed westward, the snow squeeking under our boots. When we were well out of sight of everyone, our hands managed to meet; her left one, my right one. Wow, what a rush! I never had felt anything like it before. Like an electric current buzzing through me, from head to toe. We were silently walking. Words were superfluous.

After a quarter hour or so, we arrived at our first house. Our hands separated and one of us rang the bell. A lady opened the door. We hardly had to explain our mission, every Swiss knew what PRO JUVENTUTE stamps were. She bought a few, we thanked and stopped at her neighbors, on down the road. Most people bought. Some offered us cookies, most didn't. Finally, at the far end of our route, in Uetikon, we reached our *place de resistance*. It was the grand mansion of the biggest industrialist in the area, the owner of a large, ugly, dun-colored chemical plant that sprawled from the shore of Lake Zurich past the road and rail line, inland, to the edge of town. No way were we about to push the bell button at the front door. We even were trepidant about ringing the bell next to the sign *Ablieferungen* - deliveries, but one of us did. A short rotund lady in a white duster with a white cap on her head, sort of like a shower cap, greeted us with a smile. So far so good. We explained our mission. She asked us to come in. After we passed through a short white-painted hall she opened a swinging double door into a cavernous, gleaming, white-tiled space. It was the largest kitchen either of us ever had seen. We were dazzled. A huge stove, counters, tables, chopping blocks, sinks. The lady in white let our amazement settle in a few seconds and then excused herself to find out how many stamps the household would buy. Fifty! We grinned from ear to ear, handed over 50 stamps, collected the money and, before we could thank: "Just a minute". The lady disappeared and reappeared with a bag of home-made cookies. We thanked profusely, at least as much for the cookies as for the money we had collected. The cookies were ours, the money wasn't. The cookies were delicious, but nothing compared to the thrill of holding hands with Herzli on our way back to Mænnedorf.

As we neared Mænnedorf, we each put our hands in our pockets. We would not want anyone, especially not our school buddies, to see us hold hands; no way. Having turned in the money, we bid each other good bye, without a kiss, alas. Wonderful just the same, to have been together these couple of hours, just the two of us.

"We saw you! We saw you! You were holding hands! You and Herzli are in love!" greeted us on Monday as we arrived at school, separately. Somebody had seen us and had spread the word. Darn! How delightful! The yells might have started out teasing when they left the kids' lips, but by the time they hit my ears and blushing cheeks, they had turned into sweet music.
"When you get married, your kids will have red hair."
"No, brown or black" countered other would-be matchmakers.

I was bit embarassed, but lapped it up, not minding at all that we had been discovered holding hands. Herzli was a bit taken aback at being married off that unexpectedly, but took the teasing in good spirits and with a gracious smile.

What a Saturday it had been. Charity and young love.

School was work, lots of it, dotted by ups and downs, leavened by fun. But, there was a world beyond school, a stage where life entertained and instructed.

Miscellaneous curiosities

Thunder guns

Below my window, beyond our garden and the Landstrasse that wound its way down into town, grew a cherry orchard of magnificent trees. In spring, they were a sea of white blossoms, in summer, crowns of deep green. I could not make out the cherries hanging from the branches when I looked out of my window, but I sure could see and long for these clusters of nearly black beauties when I rode my bike down the road. Longing had to satisfy me, because the cherries' owner had a reputation of great unkindness when he caught anyone stealing his fruit.

He was determined to protect his cherries, not just from boys and other thieves, but also from the ravages of nature. Thunderstorms, with their waves of hail are the nemesis of any farmer, especially near mountain ranges. All that effort and expense, and the crop wiped out in minutes. So, when storm clouds gathered and a lightning storm was imminent, the farmer and his hired hands stuck long, thin stakes into the ground just below the road, near the uphill edge of the orchard. The stakes, one every 20 or 30 feet, pointed upward and southward, in the direction of arriving heavy weather. A cylinder tangling a string was attached to the top of each stake, each tube a giant fire cracker, a miniature rocket.

When the clouds bulged into a grayish black, rafter-rattling thunder neared, and the sky was rent by webs of lightning, the farmer and his crew came running in their slickers, each one heading for one of the fire crackers. At the first wind-whipped drop, they lighted the fuses, the thunder guns shot into the sky, trailing sparks and then bam! bam!, they exploded in the clouds that threatened the orchard. The men, slickers glistening in the drenching rain, then ran from stake to stake until all the guns had been spent. I have no idea whether or not the explosions kept rain from turning into hail, but it was quite a *son et lumie`re* show - the lightning-fired sky, the rumble of thunder and flash-bang of the hail splitters.

Sadly for me, when I looked out that same window when Joan and I visitied Tante Erica in 1980, where cherry trees had grown, houses had sprouted.

Bubbly in a cellar

West of the cherry orchard, uphill a bit, along my way to school, lived an old farmer, his face as weathered as the batten of the barn. He was crotchety, but concocted the best cider in town. He mixed just the right proportion of juices from flavorful tart apples and cider pears and then stored it in wooden barrels that lined the walls of his chilly cellar lighted by a couple of naked bulbs dangling from the low ceiling. What a perfect place for a tale of mystery and terror! Just the creaks of the wooden stairs that led into the fragrant dimness chilled the spine.

I had come with two one-liter bottles to fetch sweet cider to wash down a fall dinner. The fresh, almost spicy aroma of the cider helped make a meal into a feast. A little later in the season, I still came with two bottles, one for still cider, the one without a hint of alcohol, for us children. In the other one, swarms of bubbles rose to the top as the cider neared the neck of the vessel. The fuller the bottle got, the more my nose caught the enticing aroma of the fermenting juices.

The crochety old man was nice enough to not ignore my unsubtle hint:
"That sure smells good."
"Want to try some?"
"YES, please."
He fetched a dented tin cup from a shelf, filled it half way and handed it to me. Bitty gas bubbles trapped in a film of cider tickeled my nose as they jumped out of the cup when I lifted it to my mouth and others tickled my tongue as I savored that lively drink. Ever since, cider that no longer is innocently sweet, but perked up by the effervescence of puberty has been one of my favorite pleasures of fall. Now we buy unpasteurized cider in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada and let it sit in the refrigerator or in the cool garage until bubbles line the top of the liquid ambrosia in the jug. Ah!

As fall turned into winter, I carried only one bottle into and out of the cellar. This bottle was for adults only, mainly for Papa Spoerry, because now the cider was at full strength, definitely rated NC, not for children. I did get to taste a bit from that tin cup (Did it ever get washed?), but it was harsh, no longer the frisky juice of earlier in the fall. At this stage it was the scourge of all too many Swiss farmers and their hands who indulged to excess during the long winter nights. Hard cider was cheap and is potent.

Bubbly in a bowl

Herr Kunz, still a resident of my little blue address book, though crossed out, took an interest in me when he was coaching us boys of the Jugendriege. Whether it was because I could stand a lot of improvement in my athletic performance, because he knew that as a boy without parents I might like some extra attention, or both, I don't know. Whichever it was, he sometimes invited me over to his house to teach me card games and to enjoy goodies his wife had baked. He also let me kibitz when he and three of his friends played cards. This one time, in fall, I visited after the grapes had been harvested and crushed; the *Sausser* (pronounced *Soosser* in dialect) was ready. Sausser is a bubbly elixir, the youthful stage of wine as it ferments, the same as when cider has advanced from sweetness to perkiness. The game had ended, the cards had been cleared away and the players were ready for some refreshment. Instead of a wine glass, Mrs. Kunz set a large white soup plate in front of each player, a small bowl on one corner of the table for me, and gave each one of us a soup spoon. In the meantime, Mr. Kunz had brought two unadorned green bottles, each one filled to the neck with red wine from some local vintner.

I was puzzled by the soup plate-spoon-wine business. I had never heard of anyone spooning wine; I waited to see what would come next. Mr. Kunz filled each plate nearly to the rim and my bowl to cover the bottom and a little more. Next came a large round loaf of rye bread, still warm enough at the center to waft its rich, earthy aroma to my nose as Mrs. Kunz cut thick slices. The men each took a slice of bread, broke it into bite-size pieces and dropped them into the wine. I followed suit. The men then spooned the wine-soaked pieces of bread into their mouths. So did I. Delicious! By the time I had swallowed the last bite of soaked bread, I knew I had had enough. My legs were gaining weight and my eyes were a bit wobbly. The men kept on spooning their pieces of bread.

Seeing my puzzlement, Herr Kunz explained that bread soaked in Sausser was way superior to champagne. It "worked", had some real flavor, was cheaper, and more fun. A contest was under way. The men would keep spooning until the winner was clear - the last one to still sit at the table, rather than snoring at or under it. I didn't stick around that long; fresh air is what I needed and the drunk sprawled on the sidewalk in Mindelheim appeared as if by magic. I thanked and took my leave, happy at having been introduced to this game with wine. I never again savored Sausser during my years in Switzerland, but the memory of that effervescent, delightful liquid and its enticing flavor remained with me.

That effervescence bubbled up again on a fall day in 1980 when Joan and I took the streetcar from Zurich to the Forch. We were ready for a picnic lunch near a black and white road sign that pointed to Herrliberg. A little country store by the cross road offered cheese, rolls and bottled drinks. Looking around, I spotted a rack with 500-milliliter bottles of wine. I read the label. Sausser! I almost jumped, I was so excited about my find. It was October, the month of Sausser and of my birthday, time to celebrate. Joan insisted we also buy a bottle of mineral water; she couldn't believe the stuff could be as good as I had bragged. We sat on the rim of a fountain by a wall for our *al fresco* lunch, muching, sipping, being happy. She was convinced: The rest of the week in Switzerland we shared a carafe of Sausser at each dinner and were tempted to carry a bottle home to California, the land of vines and wines. My memory had not been inflated by nostalgia.

Padded birds

Presumably clear sober was whoever had answered my question: "How come birds don't get electrocuted when they sit on a power line, but if we touch a wire we get shocked or even killed?" The answer: "God knew there would be electric wires so he gave birds pads on their feet that would insulate them from electricity." I didn't know what to make of this response. I couldn't quite believe that God would know about electrified wires so long ago, when he supposedly created animals and even people. My puzzelment remained undiminished until I was enlightened, months later, by some sensible person. I then knew that the Bible, when interpreted by those blindly faithful, could lead one astray about the world God allegedly had created.

Natural curiosity

I was curious not just about birds on wires but even more so about girls and women on the ground. I likely had seen diapers being changed on baby girls, but those were babies; their anatomy just didn't register. By the time I was a mid-teenager, I was bothered that I never had seen a naked women. I didn't think of it in sexual terms; I simply was curious. I knew what boys and even adult men looked like below the waist, even that some looked a bit strange, unfinished, because they had not been circumcised. And, of course, men bared their chests without a second thought. Why should there be such a secret about women's bodies, except for those who lived far away in tropical lands? I didn't dwell on it, but I was curious. The possibility that other boys my age never had seen a naked women either never entered my head. It wasn't something one talked about. Maybe my need to know would have been stilled had we ever been taught any biology, especially human. Nothing of the sort. My first course in biology didn't catch up with me until my second year of college. No wonder I felt and was ignorant.

Then, one hot summer day I had enough coins to go swimming at the municipal beach on Lake Zurich. The sandy stretch, though not very long or wide, rarely was crowded. I had come alone and entertained myself swimming out and then back toward shore or laying on my back and lolling on the gentle waves.

After a while, I left the cooling water to soak up sun and let my shrivelled fingers again fill out their skin. As I sat there, a women, no longer youthful but with a good figure, emerged from the lake and approached from my right, passing right in front of me. She wore a dark green knit wool bathing suit, the kind that were in fashion then, but without the little modesty skirt reminiscent of chastity belts of the Middle Ages. Her suit clung to her like shrink wrap. Her wool-covered nipples protruded from her full breasts and, most amazing, as my eyes followed her from head to feet, the wet fabric clearly contoured the shape between her legs. So that's what it looks like down there! Like a full-lipped mouth turned vertical. I also was a bit disappointed: It looked so plain, not that interesting. But, maybe, just possibly, that dark green wet wool might be hiding a mystery I couldn't even imagine.

After my black wool swim trunks had dried and before my skin was too red, I changed to my street clothes and walked home, my curiosity cooled, for now.

Reminders of war

As I lolled and ogled on the beach, the turmoil beyond Switzerland was far from my mind, though reality was nearer than it seemed. The Boche troops and their collaborators in occupied France were only about 70 miles westward and the sky had no fences. Everyone knew of the terror the German Stuckas, the dive bombers, had inflicted on the helpless civilians of Belgium and France as they fled their shattered burning homes in 1940 and no one knew whether or when they would streak in from the north or west. The Swiss could not have stopped them, from air or ground. Nightly blackouts were the only defense.

I don't remember any black shades in Rütibühl, out in the country, but in Zurich and Mænnedorf, in every town along the lake and village, black shades or closed shutters were synonymous with dusk, even in my crow's nest. We figured the Nazi pilots could find us, day or night. When you're impotent, even make-believe helps the psyche.

During the first years of the war, when the Germans swept over much of the Old World, the only remnants we saw of the devastation they wrought were the bedraggled Polish soldiers who had been shipped to France to fight, were routed there with the French, and, if lucky, had escaped to be interned in Switzerland. They looked tired and wan in their mud-brown uniforms. People felt sorry for them, for a while. Later, when these soldiers had recovered from their defeat and looked well fed and perky, some Swiss started to worry about them. What if these young men, far from home, from the dump that was Poland, the bottom of the pecking order in pre-war Europe, raped one of their daughters, or worse, if one of them fell in love with one of these *"Polacken"* and wanted to marry him? If that happened, you couldn't even jail him. God forbid! I have no idea whether either of these fears was justified by facts. But, imagination incubated with fear and prejudice can poison the air anywhere.

What disgusted me came later. Toward war's end, after fleeing Germans had slipped into Switzerland. no one openly appeared to worry about them, in their neat uniforms and sassy caps, possibly plucking some immaculate Swiss flowers. The murderers of Europe strolled openly about the streets and rode the trains, avoided by no one, it seemed, but me. If I spotted one on a train, I immediately switched compartments. No way would I breath the air he had exhaled.

After D-Day, as the Americans and British pushed the Germans eastward and Allied planes fanned out ever closer to us, quite a few managed to escape to Swiss air space after Nazi anti-arcraft shells or fighter pilots had found their mark.

One day, I happened to stick my head out the window of my room to absorb the sun and take in the scenery, the lake below, the hills and mountains beyond, a sight of which I never tired. Suddenly, toward the right, the northwest, I spotted huge white umbrellas. A blink later, a cloud of smoke. I was too far away to see the men hanging from the parachutes, but they glided slowly downward and disappeared behind the ridge, apparently well out of the way of the doomed plane. I was thrilled that these Allied fighters had cheated the Nazis and that I had seen them floating downward, presumably unharmed, from the safe Swiss sky. I felt mighty important when I raced down to tell everyone in the house and the next day at school. After all, if you didn't see it, it hadn't happened, because neither newspapers nor radios spread such news. They did not want to advertise that Switzerland was a safe haven for Allied planes on the run. No one knew what the Nazis would do as they started to taste defeat and humiliation.

Allied men, American, British, a few Free French, also moved freely about the country, always greeted with smiles, the Americans in their Eisenhower jackets and with oversize sunglasses hiding their eyes. On sidewalks in Zurich, Allied and German uniforms passed each other; on street cars they sat near each other and gawked and whistled at the same girls. Swiss soldiers eyed the snappy American uniforms with envy and a touch of resentment: Their own greenish-gray plain-cut issue looked dowdy by comparison, as if a Soviet fashion designer had assembled them for an enemy of the state.

The most pervasive daily sign of war beyond the borders, other than black curtains and shades, was rationing, from meat to shoe leather, including gasoline. Since few Swiss had cars, most small, there was no mass panic about this deprivation. Some who had cars resorted to ingenious devices to keep them moving. One day, as I walked up the Ræmistrasse in Zurich to have lunch at the Adlers, I heard this labored engine noise coming from behind, next to the sidewalk. I turned around and beheld this odd-looking creature; it was a miniscule car and on its back it carried a rack with split hard-wood logs and some contraption to convert the wood into motive power; how I have no idea. I smiled at the little critter as it moseyed by me, just a bit faster than I walked. The city was full of surprises.

The news that surprised the world was no news for me when the *Fresno Bee* ran a story in 1999 about a big secret, hidden half a century. To us school kids in Mænnedorf it hadn't been a secret at all. We knew that workers were hollowing out mountains to house Swiss troops and their supplies - ammunitions, weapons, fuel, food - whatever was needed to fight an invader, so the defenders could hold out for months, at least, if the Nazis decided to annex the country. Sure, we didn't know the exact location of these buried fortresses, but the effort was no secret. The Swiss not only hollowed out their mountains; even some of their beautiful lakes hid more than fish. Deep under the surface rested steel silos in which grain and fuel were stashed away for a major emergency. In the lakes, the tanks were out of sight, even from the air, and the cool water helped preserve the grain. Nothing hush-hush about that either, whoever told us, told it with pride in Swiss ingenuity and determination to remain free. The bankers and their gold may have been the Swiss' government's most effective deterrent against a German invasion, but the weapons for an honorable defense also were ready.

Dirt farmer days

I was too young to serve in the army, even if I had been a Swiss citizen.
Like thousands of other high school boys (girls too?) I was drafted to work on a farm for a few weeks during the harvest season. No one escaped, no one I knew wanted to escape this duty. We had to lend our arms while farmers' sons and hired hands shouldered rifles instead of pitchforks or scythes.

I served one stint, on a farm in the hamlet of Bonau, near Gehrau, in the Canton of Thurgau, the bread basket and potato bin of Switzerland. The year was 1944; in 1943 I would have been too young and by harvest 1945 the Germans had capitulated. Since skipping school was no minor matter in Switzerland, I assume that our vacation was postponed from summer to early fall, when grains were golden and potatoes plump.

I looked forward to this new adventure, not having a clue what to expect, except more than an hour on a train, with a change in Zurich. There was nothing memorable about the terrain in the Thurgau as we rolled through the countryside, just a flat to wavy spread of golden fields of grain, verdant pastures, grass drying into hay and orchards, all interspersed with woodlands, dotted with with farmsteads and church spires jutting skyward from villages.

A farm hand picked me up at the station - I was unmistakable as the the only teenager who left the train. The ride on the pants-polished wooden seat of a shay pulled by a sleek brown horse lasted just a few minutes. As we rolled in to the courtyard, I was relieved to see that the farm house, one of few in a cluster, looked not one bit chintzy, where food might be poor and meager, but reflected diligence and care. The house of dark brown boards was kept from drabness by a white plastered wall up to the sill of the lower windows and by red-flowered geraniums that spilled out of window boxes. As I lighted from the wagon and faced the front door, the horse barn stood to the left, attached to the house, and the cows and draft oxen were stabled across the gravelled courtyard. A spacious hay loft crowned the stables.

The lady of the house, darkish blonde and unadorned, face weathered but still handsome, was easy-going and, most critical to me, an excellent and generous cook. Aside from her husband, one or two other males and a maid shared the meals and work. One of them was a school boy, like I, a bit older, with whom I shared a room under the rafters.

Rising at dawn was no strain for me; I was used to it. The routine was the same as at home, except here on the farm, I was shod with my winter boots instead of with shoes as I rattled down the stairs to be greeted by the wake-up aroma of rye bread just out of the oven. As soon as I rounded the corner into the kitchen I saw, centered on the table, a large platter heaped with a flat-topped mountain of potatoes, coarsely grated and then roasted golden to light brown, the ubiquitous *Rœsti*. Delicious! A perfect start of the day. Serving spoons were absent; everyone around the table, farmer, wife, maid and hands, took her or his own fork, pushed the plate against the platter and dragged a mini-mountain onto the plate. The first morning I was surprised by this bit of country crudity; after that, no big deal. Ample fresh full-fat milk from the resident cows, butter and jam rounded out the morning feast. I recall neither eggs nor bacon. The other meals must have been equally generous; my stomach never complained of being underfed.

The *Erdæpfel*, earth apples, were my least favorite crop. Even after a horse-pulled plow had loosened the tubers from the grasp of the sticky soil, they did not jump into the gunny sacks scattered along the rows. It was us, two or three other helpers and I, who had to pick up each spud, slough off soil, lay it into a bucket and then empty that into the nearest sack. No just dumping; the potatoes had to glide into the sack, not plop, so they would not get bruised by hitting each other. "A bruised potato is a rotten potato come spring."

Even short as I was, about five foot five, the top of the dirt was far below my fingertips. The only way to get them and the rest of my hand down to the potatoes was by bending my back and keeping it bent until the bucket was full. Kneeling would have been OK, but my muscles twitch just at the thought of my knees touching that damp autumn-cold soil. Bucket full, back straight; bucket emptied, back bent again, again and again. What a relief when the bell struck ten at some distant church and Mrs. Farmer, whatever her name, appeared at the edge of the field, basket and jug in hand. As soon as we field hands spotted her, we hied to the shade tree at the edge of the potato patch and welcomed her with an enthusiastic chorus of "*Guete Morge!*" She had brought bread and cheese and from a jug she poured each one of us a tin cup full of fresh sweet cider. Then, we each pulled a thick slice of bread and a generous hunk of cheese out of the basket and sat on the grass on dry days, or leaned against the tree trunk when the ground was too wet, munching, sipping cider and chatting. I wasn't a bit concerned about a little dirt rubbing off my hands onto my bread or cheese. I remembered my father's reassurance that eating a little dirt did no harm. Those days of potato after potato, bucket after bucket, of bent back and cold hands, were no vacation. I certainly deserved my Mittagessen at the end of the long back-bending mornings. Haying was a pleasure, by comparison.

Once the night-time dampness had evaporated from the hay under a sunny sky, the now dry swaths lay where the fresh green grass, mixed with white- and purple-flowered clover, had dropped after the scythe in the farmer's hands had sliced off the growth a thumb's length above the ground a few days before I landed on the farm. I was handed a wide wooden rake with long wooden tines angled slightly backward, the cross-piece attached to a handle that seemed as long as a vaulting pole. A farm hand demonstrated how to hold it, how to throw the rake forward without letting the handle slip out of the hand and then drag it back with a stretch of hay under the tines. Then a lift to let loose the hay so it would end up as a windrow. I watched, I tried and, bit by bit, I got the hang of holding and pulling the rake at an angle that would haul in the maximum amount of hay without getting hung up on the stubble. It was work, but not back-bending work like grubbing potatoes. Once the hay was windrowed, we used pitch forks, just like the one in the farmer's hand in Grant Wood's "American Gothic", to maneuver the fodder into piles, may be three feet high, like miniature burial mounds, each one surrounded by the breath of this crisp winter feed, a nostalgic aroma of farm life.

While a couple of us were nudging the last of the windrows into piles, others already were busy loading the hay on to an ox-pulled wooden wagon equipped with large wood-spoked wheels and a low fence-like cradle to confine the load. Now, each us poked our forks into the mounds, lifted the load almost vertically over our heads, walked over to the wagon, lowerd the load, so the farm hand on the wagon cold pull it off and tamp it down slightly to make a firm load. Somehow, I can't believe he pulled it off with his bare hands, because coming that close to the pointed tines would be decidedly hazardous, but then, maybe that is how he did it.

I didn't exactly walk over to the wagon with my loads of hay, wobble is closer to the truth. Not wanting to look like a city chicken, I forked up as much hay as the adults did and then struggled to lift the load up over my head. The first few tries, I just made it over to the edge of the wagon before the weight pulled itself down. By the third or fourth try, with advice from the crew and good-natured kidding about my city muscles, I had learned to pick up a load I could handle and had figured out how to hold the fork - one hand low, the other one high - so it would stay vertical until I had staggered to the edge of the wagon. The rest of the day went well. It almost was fun; my muscles seemed to toughen as I worked.

A day or a week later, our grain is ripe and dry. The men cut the golden crop with their scythes, swath by swath, in rythmic swings, as graceful as dancers. I admire their taut, tanned, and bulging biceps and sinewy lower arms that stick out from their rolled-up shirt sleeves, but I definitely am not interested in earning them the way they do. Mowing tough, dry straw with scythes, hour on hour, that is hard, skilled work, not my kind. First, I do not have the skill, second, the boss knows my arms would drop off after a quarter hour, at most. But, I do have to help move the mounds of straw heavy with heads of grain onto a wagon, just as I had done with the hay. Except, today, a rush propels everyone. Thunderstorm weather threatens; the grain has to be saved from being soaked. Every member of the farm, except the maid, who stayed home to tend to cooking, is out here in the field, cutting, raking, lifting, stacking. I have one hell of a time. The wind is rushing and it nearly topples me as I try to lift my loaded pitch fork, weighed down with wheat, up to the wagon. I struggle as if against a sail attached to my arms, a sail I can not control. I sweat, as much from embarrassment at my clumsy weakness as from work. Still, no one kids and no one scolds; all are too busy and too nice. I do what I can to help move the harvest under shelter. A collective sigh of relief; the last load is in the barn minutes before the deluge. Table talk is minimal that evening; the rush has sapped everyones energy. Even if any one had thought about it, no one needed to urge me to hit the sack. On a farm it was easy to have the *Schlaf der Gerechten*, the sleep of the just.

To struggle with a pitchfork of hay over my head was one thing, at least it was not alive, it just seemed to have its own will. But, how was I so lucky to deserve the farmer's confidence to run a team of oxen when I never had run anything larger than my obedient bicycle? He must have been desperate for help. The beasts already had pulled the empty wagon out into the field to fetch their feed after some storm-doused hay again had dried. I was to guide them back to the barn. What would I do if these bovines refused to move? What if they moved too fast? A vain fear with oxen, I found out later. What if the harness lines became tangled ? I was flattered the farmer was willing to entrust me with two oxen and a load of hay, but what if

the wagon tipped over or got stuck in a rut? A whole litany of what ifs raced through my brain as I took the reins and walked next to one of the oxen. No problem. The animals obviously had trod that route from field to barnyard before; they knew what to do and where to turn; they hardly needed me, a skittish straw boss. These dumb beasts were smarter than I then knew; even if I goofed up, they would not. None of the what ifs befell me and we arrived at the barn without trouble, the oxen stolid, I relieved. I left the wagon where I had been told to stop, in front of the barn. A farm hand came and rescued me; he unhitched the oxen, followed them into the stable and made sure they were in their stanchions.
"May I feed them some hay?"
"It's not time, but go ahead."
It was my thanks to the beasts for having behaved so well.

Every farm boy in Switzerland and most of their sisters had learned to milk a cow by the time they started school. The farmer thought I ought to try it, too. I was eager to learn the trick, until I had the chance. That cow was just too darn big. I didn't trust her; what if she kicked me in revenge for an inadvertent pinch? She didn't trust me either once she felt my hesitant fingers on her teats; she twitched her skin, swished her tail and lowed as if annoyed. I had a hard time just balancing myself on the milk stool while leaning my head against the cows rump. It was a dry run. The farmer has seen enough and I had enough. I never again tried to milk a cow.

The days and nights passed quickly and school days were about to start again. On the last morning, I packed my suitcase, piled my plate high with breakfast *Rœsti* and then bid *"Auf wiedersehe"* ,*"Danke"* and shook hands all around. All generously thanked me for my help and Frau Farmer handed me my stipend, government-mandated. How much it was, I have no idea. I just hope that between it and my amazing appetite the farmer at least broke even.

A wagon ride to the station and a train ride back to Mænnedorf ended my dirt farmer days. What did they do for me? My body may have ached at sunset some of the days, but tanned skin now covered arm muscles, a little bigger and stronger than they were two or three weeks earlier; at least I thought so when I critiqued them in front of the bathroom mirror once I again was home. I felt good that I was able to help my adopted country - I felt adopted, even though I wasn't - at least a little bit and most important, I knew that no way would I want to be a farmer. Too much tough work for my soft body.

What did I want to be? What did I want to do with myself? I had no clue as my last half year in high school was about to start.

What next?

Farming was not for me; grubbing potatoes, haying, milking cows. No way. In contrast, nosing about the kitchen had entertained me ever since I was a little kid, at home in Mindelheim. Being a chef in white apron and tall white toque appealed to me. I would be surrounded by food; I could concoct dishes, especially my favorites like beef tongue, ox tail soup, Rœsti, and marble cake. That idea would be worth checking out. Somehow, I had found out that a culinary arts school in Lausanne was producing chefs for famous restaurants and hotels. I would become such a famous chef at one of the great hotels in Zurich, in Geneva, or in Ouchy, where I had spent sunny hours at the beach of Lake Geneva. Sounded pretty exciting. Why not? I found out why not when I next visited the Bollags in Zurich and asked what they thought about my idea.

"*Die Schul isch sehr teuer. Wer würd dafür zahle*?" - That school is very expensive. Who would pay for it? No answer needed; it was wrapped in the question. "Besides, do you realize the size of the pots and pans you would have to handle? You just aren't big enough for that kind of hard work and in a noisy sweltering kitchen, too." So there was more to being a chef than playing with food, much more than I had realized. With farming and cooking subtracted from my future, what else might I do and enjoy doing, year after year?

I also had to keep in mind that sooner or later, with the Allies pounding the Germans from Italy to Russia, I, a penniless guest, undoubtedly would have to leave Switzerland, a country where citizenship for a foreign-born only rode in on the back of a hefty bank account. Of course, I had no clue what might happen once I was in America, my likely destination after the war. Right just now, the war still raged and my newly-minted American relatives could offer no advice. About my parents I knew nothing; they were totally beyond reach, even if still alive.

I was not attracted to business. Fiddling with figures would drive me to boredom and the way it crabbed Aunt Martha made it even less inviting. True, no one had suggested I train for a career in business, but for me it was just as important to know what I did not want to or could not do as what I might want to and could do. Except, right now, in early fall of 1944, the score was 3 to 0. How could I earn a living and achieve independence? That was the question.

Later in fall, on a weekend visit, the Bollags asked me to come for a walk with them, just with the two of them, Uncle Victor and Aunt Martha. Something was up. They never had asked to me to accompany them on a walk by myself, without Hanspeter. It was just to be I with them. Most unusual.

The trees were brilliantly dressed for fall and sun and clouds vied in the blue sky as we stepped from Tœdistrasse 50 down to the sidewalk and turned left, toward the lake. Small talk, about school, about whatever, moved back and forth among us as we neared the broad Quai Bridge and crossed it, Lake Zurich to our right, the Limmat gliding below us, the central city to the left. At the end of the bridge we turned right onto the Uto Quai, toward the elaborately imposing Opera House. Why the *Spaziergang* for three? This question blurred my appreciation of the lovely lake shore with its trees and benches, sail boats and steamers on the water.

We stopped on the city side of the Opera House. Instead of sitting on a bench, we stood by the black wrought iron railing along the wall that kept the lake in its assigned domain. I don't know why they, Uncle Victor and Aunt Martha, didn't want to sit down on one of the many comfortable benches, most empty; it would have been the reasonable thing to do. Instead, we stood in sort of a shallow triangle, Aunt Martha and Uncle Victor being two of the points and I the third one.

The gestation period finally had ended and they opened their vision for my future. They saw and explained my state and my status as it was right then: no parents, no money, no skills. How true, how triply true. Any prospect of ever being reunited with my parents had dimmed into virtually nothing by that fall of 1944, even more so than I knew. Cogitating about these incontrovertible facts, they, the two of them, Aunt Martha and Uncle Victor, had decided I should learn a craft; it would make me independent. True again, but which craft?

A carpenter. Yes, I would be apprenticed to a carpenter. A carpenter?!

How could I possibly be a carpenter? The last time I swung a hammer was in Herrliberg when I was thirteen. I did know how to push and pull a saw, but not necessarily straight. After all, the fire-wood I had sawed at the Voneschs would burn just as well cut angled as square. This was ridiculous, I a carpenter! I wasn't handy and geometry was my worst subject. And, how would I build the needed muscle? The carpenters I had seen looked like muscle men to me; they were born strong. I swallowed all these racing thoughts. All I did was hem and haw with useless phrases. "*Wirklich?*"- Really? "*Wo?*"-Where? I don't remember the answers; they were a blur even then.

I would be the first craftsman in our family. All had been merchants, my father, my grandfathers and their fathers. They all had been respected businessmen and I was to be a carpenter, the kind of worker Aunt Martha scorned, as she had scorned Mr. Vonesch when he came to replace the glass of the door to their entry. I could not protest; I knew of no better alternative. I did not want to be a merchant either, but I rather would have struggled with numbers than with nails. Anyway, what I might have wanted was irrelevant. I was not in charge of my present or my future. I depended on the good will and money of others. In the Switzerland of the 1940s, even an enterprising teenager could not just set out and say "To hell with it!" and head out west to make his fortune. There was no west, real or imagined. War raged all around and all frontiers were closed, not only those on the map, but also those of the mind. I was not brought up to be enterprising. Adults ruled the world and most sons followed in their father's footsteps, but my father's footsteps had been torn out from under me when I was only eleven. I had to find my own direction, my own goal. To where and what was it? I only knew those picked by the Bollags were not mine.

The way back to the Bollags' flat seemed long indeed and I said little. I a carpenter? I was in the dumps. Later in the day, as I sat on the train back to Mænnedorf, my spirits lightened as the distance between me and the Bollags increased and after I had convinced myself, without any evidence whatever, that the carpenter business may not have been a decision, just a suggestion. The final word would be Aunt Jenny's. I hoped she would stay healthy; that she would run out of money seemed unlikley,

Once I had vented my annoyance about the Bollags' vision of my future to Tante Erica, thoughts of the future receded until I visited Aunt Jenny, a week or two later.

Aunt Jenny did not discuss serious matters over Mittagessen; important topics could not be disturbed by clanking spoons or requests for more potatoes or carrots. After the maid had cleared the table, Aunt Jenny bid me sit next to her, she in her flower-patterned lady's easy chair and I, facing her, on an upholstered straight-back chair.

That is when she revealed *her* plans for me.

Aunt Jenny explained in her quiet but authoritative voice, a voice she never needed to raise to be heard, that I would have to prepare myself for life in the United States, my likely destination after the war. She declared that the best training would be more education. Relief! Joy! The apprenticeship, the carpenter, they had vanished in an instant. Gratitude for a wise aunt. Neither of us knew anything about life in the United States near the end of World War II, what the opportunities would be or what plans my relatives there might have for me. Education endures, had endured from biblical times for Jews, she said. I also suspect that her patrician instincts rebelled at the idea of one of her relatives, even one distant, being a blue collar worker. There was no precedent in our big and scattered family; it was populated by merchants, manufacturers, bankers, cattle dealers, and, way back, peddlers, at a time when kings, princes and popes proscribed many roads to a livelihood for Jews.

Swiss youths with brains, and cash from papa, attended a Gymnasium after high school. The gymnasia are the training grounds for the universities, for future professionals from physicians and lawyers to engineers and scientists. Latin and

literature, physics and mathematics, psychology and history, all the liberal arts and sciences are their domain. All that would be too esoteric for me, assuming I could qualify, for someone who would want to and should be able to soon earn a living.
I listened intently to Aunt Jenny's plans for me.

She had decided I should study at the Handelsschule in Zurich. This school was the business equivalent of the Gymnasium, the school where young Swiss men were prepared for entry-level jobs in banking and business and, if they qualified, for transfer to the Handelshochschule, the equivalent of an MBA breeding ground. In contrast to the gymnasium, the Handelsschule had no snob appeal, its students wore casual clothing, not suits or sports jackets, slacks and ties. No problem. I knew I was not part of any elite.

My heart swelled with gratitude for Aunt Jenny's generosity - she would be paying the bills. I thanked her and promised I would do my best to justify her confidence in me. I even planted a non-reluctant kiss on her wrinkled cheek. Sure, I did not want to be a businessman, but compared to pulling and pushing a saw or whacking nails on the head in heat and cold, it would be paradisical. I wouldn't just study numbers stuff, but also history, geography and languages. The fire Lehrer Walder had fanned in my brain could continue to burn. And, as a bonus, I would be riding the train to Zurich every weekday, to the city I loved, coursed by narrow streets lined with historic buildings, bisected by the wide, rich Bahnhofstrasse with its well-dressed denizens, and boasting grand hotels by and sailboats on the lake. Almost every day I would see at least some of them. Wow! The Bollags had been trumped.

I hardly could wait to tell the Spoerrys of my good luck. They rejoiced with me, particularly Tante Erica, who couldn't imagine me as a carpenter any more than I could.

There just remained one hurdle, a high one, between me and the Handelsschule. I had to pass an entrance examination.

The alarm clock in my head rang even before the mechanical one on the floor next to my bed that morning in the early quarter of 1945. I had to catch the seven o'clock train to be at the Handelsschule in Zurich before eight, the hour the entrance exam was to start. Breakfast was hurried, even though I had plenty of time before I had to leave for the station. When the brain rushes, the body follows, even when there is no need to gallop. Of course, I was nervous. Who would not be, faced with the reality that this one exam on this one day, today, after a restless night, will determine whether I would wrestle planks and boards or stuff my mind? I had done well enough in school, the only chink being the empty spaces where math and geometry should have been firmly lodged. Besides, I was a country boy and would be competing with all those young gentlemen from the city where schools might be better and with boys who not only had parents, but parents who spoon-fed them knowledge every day. I thought of Georg Adler, my cousin, for a close-by example, his father an architect, his brother a budding engineer; learning and sophistication pervaded the household. No wonder he was smart. Besides, I had serious doubts my forehead was high enough for me to be really intelligent. Someone somewhere had impressed me with the scientific "fact" that a high forehead was twinned with high intelligence. Was mine high enough? Would mine, would I, measure up?

Breakfast finished and teeth brushed, I donned my one sports jacket and straightened my one tie, both concessions to this special day, and rushed a good bye to Papa and Mama Spoerry and to Tante Erica. All wished me good luck and Tante Erica planted a good luck kiss on my forehead, right in front of Papa Spoerry. A special send-off, all right.

The scenery along the tracks flitted by unappreciated and I didn't even think of eavesdropping on the conversations on the train as I worried my way to Zurich. I lighted at the Stadelhofer station and knew exactly where to go; I had passed the Handelsschule many times on my way to the Adlers. Out of the station, a right turn past the Tea Room, a right on the Ræmistrasse, up the hill past the Zeltweg, Aunt Cilli's street, past the girls' equivalent of the Handelsschule, across the Zurichbergstrasse and there, on the right it stood, my goal. A broad, imposing set of granite steps led up to the gray stone building, my temple of learning, if I passed the exams.

I double-stepped up the broad stairs even though I was far from being late; I just couldn't help it. When I passed through the wide wooden double-door with a smallish glass inserts, I came to. I wasn't alone. Dozens of other boys were milling about, most acting just as nervous as I was, only their jackets fit them, rather than hang on their shoulders, like mine. We were waiting in the large foyer from where the polished granite floor radiated down halls in various directions; a broad staircase led to the upper floors. Some boys knew each other from high school. I knew no one; I was the only boy from Mænnedorf. There were no girls from anywhere. I was at a boys' school.

Promptly at eight, a tall, thin man, balding through the middle of his cranium, one of the professors, opened the door to an anteroom. There, we lined past a table where a clerk called out and then checked off our names. I knew my name was on that list; I had been invited to take the tests. Still, I was relieved when "Werner Liebschütz" rang in my ears. We then crowded into a class room that looked much like the one in Mænnedorf, or any other class room I had seen, black chalk board, rolled up maps and the professor's desk in front, except the student desks were singles rather than doubles.

We were divided into groups. Some of us were to be subjected to written exams, others first to oral interrogations, some in math, others in languages and social sciences. I started out with the written exams in my favorite subjects, history, geography, and languages, German and French. I pretty much breezed through these pages of questions, parsing German sentences being the only hazardous section. Somehow, French grammar seemed less puzzling to me than German construction. The oral probing raised little more anxiety. I knew my subjects and I was adept at thinking on my feet. Lehrer Walder had taught us well in Mænnedorf. I was used to the sequence: bolt upright when I hear my name, stand straight, answer, and then sit down again, except in Mænnedorf it was "Werner", here it was "Herr Liebschütz". Nowhere else had I ever been addressed with this adult honorific. I felt just a little taller than when I had walked into that room.

The written math and geometry test quickly shortened me again. Straight-forward multiplication, division, squaring and even pulling square roots, all with pencil on paper, of course, weren't too worrisome. But, "*Sætzli Frage*", story problems, were just that, problems, major ones. I always had trouble getting into those sentences and then extricating myself with the right answer. My mind just doesn't seem to be built that way. What a struggle! The minutes rushed by. I hadn't finished nearly all of the exam when the professor called time and we had to hand in our papers. Jitters surfaced.

The intermission was short. The last act was about to unfold, the oral exam in math and geometry. It was a bastard. I was getting tired; the written math test had worn me out just minutes earlier, and now I would have to spout answers drawn quickly from memory. No time was allowed for really thinking or figuring. I have no recollection of the questions or of the answers, just of the terror. "Herr Liebschütz. Bla, bla bla.... ". I answered, but not as quickly as I might or should have, but I did get it right; I was relieved. Questions shot at two or three others and then at me again. Damn! Why not at the other dozen or so potential victims? The answer was nowhere to be found, either in my brain nor up on the ceiling. My insides seemed to shrink, my brain contract. Fear of failure. Then, before I had a chance to rally my wits, almost without pause, the inquisitor shot another question at me. I only half heard the question and didn't know the answer to the half I heard. Beads of sweat chilled my nose, my legs twitched and then the *Sau Chaib*, literally pig bastard, sarcastically drilled in: "*Herr Liebschütz, ruhen Sie auf Ihre Lorbeeren?*"- Are you resting on your laurels? I already was in the ditch and the SOB stomped my face into the mud. I could have killed him.

Why did he pick on me? Did he smell a wounded animal and just wanted to deliver the coup the grace? Did he torture others? I have no idea. I was way too busy with my own troubles to have paid attention to those faced by the ther boys.

Flying up those granite steps earlier that morning was effortless. Sinking down them now, with my back to the building, felt like the descent into a dungeon, the pit of carpentry, if I had failed the exam. I turned around to look at the Handelsschule. I might again see it from the sidewalk, but from the inside?

I moped down the Ræmistrasse to the station, waited for the next train, sat silently in my misery on today's slow ride to Mænnedorf, dragged myself up the hill and home to a late Mittagessen that Mama Spoerry had reheated for me. I had to little say: My face told the story of that morning. I was discouraged; I had failed myself, the Spoerrys, Lehrer Walder and, not least, Aunt Jenny. Would the Bollags win after all?

The exam was on a Saturday. I had until Monday to recover and engage my courage so I would be able to tell Lehrer Walder of my miserable performance in the math exam. He couldn't quite believe that I fouled up enough to flunk out before I got in. "Don't give up yet. May be you didn't do that much worse than others." Some consolation! But, any encouragment was better than none. I don't remember how many days crawled past me until the dreaded envelope arrived in the mail. However long it was, it seemed forever.

Then it arrived. I hardly dared open it. My heart raced as I cut open the envelope with my pocket knife, the Spoerrys, Tante Erica, Papa and Mama, in a semi-circle around me. I unfolded the letter, scanned the words and my heart took a leap and my mouth must have stretched from ear to ear. I was in! Aunt Jenny and I had won! The senior Spoerrys congratulated me, Tante Erica hugged me. Her boy had made it. "*I bi so stolz uf Di!*" - I'm so proud of you! And the next day, I could greet Lehrer Walder with a smile.

If only I could tell my parents. If I could have told them, wherever they might have been, the day would have been perfect.

The first day at the Handelsschule was still weeks away, but one fact was clear: My days would be long. During the bright days of early summer, classes would start at seven in the morning and last till about two or three, with a break for Mittagessen. That schedule meant out of bed soon after five, on the train a bit after six and not home until mid to late afternoon, most days.

The dilemma: Where would I eat my mid-day meal? A restaurant again was out of the question, just as it had been in Herrliberg. The Handelsschule had no cafeteria. Carrying a cold lunch was unthinkable; no one carried a cold Mittagessen. There was no successor to Pfarrer Schlatter and his wife, my mid-day hosts in Herrliberg.

This was the big meal of the day; the evening meal was just a supper. I had to eat properly. The answer was out of my hands; Aunt Jenny was the one who had to find a solution. How many phone calls it took her I have no idea, nor how much resistance she encountered in some quarters. Aunt Jenny was very discrete, but I had the distinct impression that the carpenter advocates were a bit reluctant to accept her Solomonic decision: I was to sit at a different table each day of the school week. Aunt Jenny on Monday, let's say, the Bollags on Tuesday, the Adler's on Wednesday, and Aunt Cilli on Thursday. No, I did not have to starve on Fridays; because of the long hours the rest of the week, a half day was enough schooling on Friday, allowing me to have Mittagessen at home, in Mænnedorf.

With the mid-day quandary resolved and winter turning into the spring of 1945, my days in high school were swept into the past, one by one, like beads on an abacus being pushed from plus to minus. While my mind had churned with worry about my future - pen or hammer in my right hand? - the Atlantic Allies in the West and the Soviets in the East had battered the Nazi Wehrmacht into retreat. The end of the war in Europe was in sight. We in Switzerland, the Swiss and thousands of refugees like I, had been spared the horrors, devastations and deprivations of the cataclysm that had roiled most of Europe, from the sky over Britain to the steppes of Russia, from the Adriatic to the Arctic Sea, since 1939.

But, where are my parents?

The final word

The Bollags, Uncle Victor and Aunt Martha, checked with the Red Cross, with Jewish organizations, with refugee organizations. Nothing followed nothing. At least not yet. After all, cannons, tank charges and bombs still shattered the air in early spring of 1945. My parents, my father and mother, just might be trapped between the armies of advance and retreat. I listened to radio reports; I devoured the news in the paper. Inexplicably, I remember nothing specific I heard or read; the revelations of the time, the unimaginable that just was emerging in the news, its extent still unknown, all this has been excised from my memory. I remember nothing. Details of insignificant happenings pop up unasked, but I can not resurrect even a smidgen of memory about when or how I found out that no trace of my parents could be found, neither of Aunt Berta and Uncle Max Bach, the last of my relatives to write to me from Germany, the last of them to be crammed into eastward bound cattle cars, destination the abyss of evil. No trace of them; all seemed to have vanished into thin air.

Hope, threadbare hope, persisted. Might they be among the streams of refugees wandering in eastern Europe or unrecorded among the living skeletons just being rescued from concentration camps? Hope persisted, stubborn hope. Then, as the summer of 1945 turned into fall and the mass of dislocated humanity had been sorted through and relocated, and neither Jakob nor Fanni Liebschütz nor Berta or Max Bach appeared on any list, those of the proven dead or of the living victims, realistic hope had ended. Only a glimmer remained, irrationally, for years.

Which day it was, I do not know. Was I told by the Bollags or was it a message from the Red Cross to me? Whichever or neither, one day I knew, despite the flicker of hope that would not die, that I never again would be able to tell my mother and father anything, of successes or failures; that I never again could count on them, as a matter of course, for help and advice instead of having to depend on the kindness of strangers and relatives. I was among wonderful people, among helpful people, but alone. Alone, though not abandoned. My eleven years in the circle of my family still reached out to me: The love that had been showered on me, the self-reliance I had been taught, the optimism I had inherited and, across those years, the last lines of the poem my father had written for and to me when even his hope had faltered:

> "A strong will - luck - and a straight path
> Will overcome everything."

It must have been this precious inheritance that kept me from feeling sorry for myself for more than a few hours or a long day. I had been lucky so far, why should that change? Nevertheless, without Tante Erica's mother-like emotional support, painful days interwoven with consciousness of loss would have intruded much more frequently.

The past, memories of family and youthful fun, of reprimands and praise, memories conscious and below the surface, guided me into the future, distant and near, helped overcome adversity and intensify the pleasures and successes of life. The past was not to be forgotten. It makes legitimate demands: Live a life that honors the martyrs, but do not let bitterness at their martyrdom rule the future and betray their legacy of courage and hope. Right then, as winter slipped inot the spring of 1945, the happy fact that I had been accepted by the Handelsschule, into*Klasse 1e*, was the key to my future. All I had to do was apply myself.

No memorable event closed my last school days in Maennedorf early in April of 1945. Four years' worth of school days had nourished my curiosity, expanded my mind and laid the foundation on which I could assemble my later education. Lehrer Walder, 93 years old as I write this, still attends lectures at the University of Zurich and swims almost every day. He had filled my head with fascinating and useful information. Above all, he fanned the flame that had been lighted by my father, to strive for excellence, to stretch the mind in a healthy body. Lehrer Walder ranks only below my parents, and with Tante Erica, in shaping my youth, the ideas and attitudes that sprang from it and still course through my life. What extraordinary luck that I landed in his orbit.

I was lucky to have Herr Walder as one of my teachers. He was unique. But, I was fortunate to have had other teachers - Freulein Wirz in Wetzwil and a few in high school in Detroit and later in college, a half dozen in all - who imparted knowledge, engendered confidence, demanded and praised, who superbly honored their profession in their devotion to teaching, and who thereby nourished whatever talents I had. To have encountered even six such mentors, among dozens, in two decades of schooling was luck, indeed. No wonder I consider teaching one of the highest callings.

My friends, especially Fritz Kaiser, Hansjakob Marti, the teacher's son, and Mario, my wrestling partner, helped me feel at home in school, not like a poor refugee kid, but a Swiss boy, just like they. And, of course, I can not ignore Herzli, the girl with the chestnut-colored hair, the one whose hand in mine had tingled my spine on that cold but glorious winter afternoon. They went their way, I went mine.

The divide between boyhood and nascent adulthood had arrived. I was looking forward to school in the big city.

Zurich school days

The train at sunrise, a day at school, the ride home, hours of home work, all linked in a daily chain, were a perfect soporific. I slept like a bear in January. Nothing woke me until my alarm clock shattered the silence. I woke instantly, was out of bed in no time and the rest was routine, efficient, but not rushed. I had readied my clothes at evening's end, after guessing the next day's weather by the look of the sky and the feel of the air. Books and note paper were in my satchel, ready to be grabbed after breakfast, on my way out the door. The way to the train station was all downhill, past the farm where the cider hardened, past the safe house, on my left, that let me catch my breath and courage when some of the aristocrats had chased me that winter day; past my high school, on the right, silent at this early hour, into the tunnel under the tracks where I had slapped the cheek of that pesky girl, up into the light on the other side, to the faded-mustard-colored clapboard railroad station with its wide overhang to protect the Mænnedorf commute contingent from rain.

In the V between the main line and a seldom-used house track greened a little spring vegetable garden, a Victory Garden, Swiss style. That kind of mini-garden decorated otherwise useless spots at rural railroad stations all over the country. No spot in Switzerland was wasted where some food could be grown during the years of danger and rationing.

Eastward, toward Stæfa, sat the barn-like building that housed extra luggage wagons on the south end and the rest rooms on the north, one for the *Herren* and one for the *Damen*, unheated, well vented and provided with last week's cut-up newspaper as toilet paper, just like in most people's homes. (I wondered who cut up the paper, the station master? I often had been the one given the job in Herrliberg and Mænnedorf. I closed the paper, cut along the long crease with a sharp kitchen knife, then took several half sheets, folded them in half and again sliced along the crease. The same step once more, the sequence repeated several times, and a stack of handy-sized sheets was ready for the wooden paper holder next to the pot.) Sitting there with little to do, reading snatches of news on these little squares could be mildly entertaining.

Urinals lined one wall of the men's room, a wash basin or two hung around the corner, and three toilet stalls, their surfaces scratched with graffiti, some educational, some puzzling, some downright disgusting, took up the wall across from the L-shaped entry. One afternoon, after my ride from Zurich, I needed to stop here. Perching on a seat of the jiggling train, bare bottom exposed to a rush of cold air from below, up the open drain pipe, was for emergencies only, as far as I was concerned, and home was not around the corner. I stepped into middle the stall, shoved the hasp to lock the door, carefully covered the top of the seat with ex news, now toilet paper to protect my rear from real or imagined contamination left by previous users and then took care of my needs. No one seemed to be in the other stalls. Just as I had risen, a voice from above, from the space between the false wall and ceiling, to my left: "*Grüetzi, Bueb*!".- Hi, boy! I was so startled, I nearly again dropped my pants. I looked up and there was a hairy head with bushy eyebrows looking down at me. I yelled at the top of my voice: "Get out!!", in guttural Zurich-Swiss. The intruder's feet hit the concrete floor, the stall door slammed, my heart pounded. I, too, rushed out of there as quickly as I could. Washing my hands could wait till I got home. No one was around. Why in hell would anyone want to climb up on a toilet seat and offend his nose with his neighbor's effusions? I could not figure it out and was too bewildered to tell anyone about this scary intrusion. Years passed before I knew the likely reason for the offense. For years after that jittering experience, I took a stall next to one with an open door.

On a happier note, during the first week of school in Zurich, I noticed a blond, wavy-haired, attractive girl, about my height, leave the train at the same station I did and also head up the Ræmistrasse. She had been two or three rail cars ahead of the one I had chosen, so she rounded the corners before I did. I hurried, but not so fast that I would catch up with with her; for now, I just wanted to find out where she was striding so confidently. It would not be the Handelsschule; no females allowed. She turned right about a block downhill from my school and climbed the steps to the *Kantonsschule für Mædchen*, the Cantonal School for Girls, dubbed the

Affenkasten, the monkey cage, from time immemorial, by the boys of the Handelsschule. I slowed down and stopped; I couldn't help but admire the swing of her hips as she sashayed up that long flight of stairs.

A day or two later, I spotted her heading downhill after school, her blond head bobbing among other girls. She turned the same corners and walzed in the same direction I did until we waited, may be ten feet apart, for the same train. It stopped; we both climbed up into the same car, she ahead of me, as I had intended. Just by chance I managed to sit down on the bench facing hers. She smiled; I smiled. Less than half way to Mænnedorf, I knew her name, now long forgotten, and she mine, her town, that she speeded my pulse, and which rail car she usually rode on her way to school. We became friends, just talking friends, not hand-holding friends; no way on the sidewalk to school or on the train, not in those times, and no other chances sprang up. She lived in Stæfa, one stop too far. I could have walked there if I had been invited, but neither girls nor boys invited each other to their houses, at least none I knew. Also, her clothes and the stories she told me spoke of well-off parents who had conveyed to her specific ideas in what kind of a boy she might take more than casual interest. Clearly, I did not measure up: no money and not Swiss. Still, I was happy to be on the train and on the sidewalk with that delightful girl. I really glowed when, on days when I got out of school earlier than she, I searched the windows high up on the Affenkasten and found her waving her hand and wafting down hand kisses that I then returned with fervor. Ah, youth!

The jealousy bug did bite me when this blossom marched down Ræmistrasse after school surrounded by a swarm of girls, all chatting, laughing, having a fine time, without me. There was no space for me in that crowd. Not until we climbed the steps to the rail car could I claim her attention. How could she prefer the company of girls to mine? Girls, so much fun, such a puzzle.

Not all was train rides and pittery-pattery hearts. Handelsschule was WORK. The biggest culprit was bookkeeping. We had to buy big buff-colored sheets with lots of lines and columns. The lines were no problems, but the columns vexed. At least one was for debits and one for credits and I had a devil of a time figuring out where this category of francs or that was supposed to land. It all seemed so clear when the tall, heavy-set, tanned, nearly bald and patient instructor wrote the examples on the board; but, somehow, the problems he gave us to solve never looked like those he had explained in class. I felt lucky to get the equivalent of a C in that course, a grade not welcomed by Aunt Jenny; she expected better for her investment in me.

Then there was business math, a decidedly non-attractive combination. The Swiss, bankers and traders by geography and lack of natural resources, were forced to memorize pounds, shilling and pence, pounds and ounces, feet and inches and all that sort of antiquated nonsense that the British finally dumped decades later and to some of which we in the USA, perversely, still cling, as if being sensible were non-patriotic, as if the British had won the Revolutionary War. We boys, future bankers and traders with the British and their empire, not only had to learn how many of these made up those, but also had to convert them into metric units, almost instantly when called upon by the professor. And, as homework we had to figure out the invoice in Swiss francs if a manufacturer in Zurich bought 100 bolts of cotton fabric @ X British pounds, y shilling and Z pence per yard. Damn nuisance, but manageable.

French, English and, especially, geography were relaxing, by comparison. An international trader needed to know the world's two major trading languages, which country was where, what resources it offered, its climate and whatever else might be useful in business. The language teachers quickly lost their identity, but Bimbo still lives. Bimbo, not a name we would have dared whisper in his presence, was short and fat. He was about as short as I was and am, only three times as wide, a walking and blustering ersatz snowman. His short legs moved amazingly fast, as if propelled by bouncy pistons attached to his belly. He and I took an immediate dislike to each other; why I have no idea. Just one of those personality conflicts. Besides, around that time, I had the urge to annoy somebody just for the hell of it. I must have needed to get some youthful rebellion out of my system and it was Bimbo who attracted my spite. I would act as if I were paying no attention and bingo, he would call on me and, just as bingo, I had the correct answer, which annoyed him, as I knew it would. He did know his subject, but once in a while he made a minor mistake and I lost no time in raising my hand. "*Liebschütz, was willst Du*?"- What do you want? He never honored us with Herr. I then would point out the error, pleased that I could show off in front of the class, and he would glower "*Ah, ja*" and move on.

Bimbo lectured in an amphitheater where the top row of seats was on the second floor and the lectern at the mezzanine level. His rotundness, height diminished by distance, topped by a bald pate encircled by a fringe of short hair, paced to and fro below us, declaiming on whatever subject was on the agenda of the day and stopping every now and then to point a long bamboo pole at features on maps he had pulled down over the wall behind him, continents, oceans, industrial centers, or trade routes ancient and modern. He was a lively and dedicated teacher, one who demanded that we stand up when he breezed in the door and then sit down, still and straight.

The minutes between the previous class and geography were sufficient to allow for some release of pressure, for horsing around. One time, some of us were chasing each other along the rows of the seats, climbing over them and running down the aisles, having a great time being boys. Sudden silence; the swirl of talking and shouting had stopped: Bimbo had opened the door, swept to the lectern and in the same breath he shouted: "Liebschütz ......?" It was some question about the homework he had assigned the day before. I shot back the answer, the correct answer, as I slid into my seat. He frowned, the class chuckled. How he would have loved to catch me off guard; how pleased I was that I speared his question.

After that close call, I left my rambunctiousness at the door, not wanting to risk being kicked out of the Handelsschule for misbehaviour, especially so soon after I just managed to squeeze in, the memory of my oral math exam still fresh. Professor Bimbo kept picking on me and I kept showing how well versed I was in geography. It turned into a game even he came to enjoy, a game that ended with a solid A for me.

Bimbo wasn't the only teacher at the Handelsschule who left his mark. Mr. English, for lack of his real name, was another one. I easily meshed into his pace from where Lehrer Walder had left off. I absorbed English almost as readily as a sponge absorbs water. Even with all the damned irregular verbs I had to memorize, the language seemed smooth, logical, not stilted like formal German. English was friendly, welcoming. It was as if I had been born to learn English. Of course, the TH sound gave me trouble; there's nothing like it in German. That hillock receded bit by bit once I had come to America and English surrounded my ears day in day out.

By the time we celebrated VE Day, my English had become useful.

Aviator glasses they wore and gum they chewed. They came by the train load, by the thousands, smartly dressed in Eisenhower jackets and khakis, in leather flight jackets and friendly smiles, in uniforms decorated with military ribbons. They were the American soldiers who just had labored heroically to subdue Nazi Germany and now were at liberty to enjoy themselves in unscarred, welcoming Switzerland. They were everywhere, on the sidewalks gawking at the sights in stone and skirts, on the streetcars, wolf whistling at pretty faces and fetching figures; they rode on trains taking in the scenery and they thronged the Zurich Hauptbahnhof where they alighted from coaches in this paradisical land, expectant eyes wide open, after having faced death and destruction from the English Channel to the Rhine and beyond, from North Africa to the Alps.

The Swiss were thrilled to have these visitors, and their money. They bought chocolate and watches, two and three on each wrist, souvenir picture books especially published for them, in English, trinkets and rail-tickets. They rented hotel rooms and girls. It was a dollar bonanza.

This welcome invasion also was a ripe opportunity for me to practice my English and to impress my classmates and instructor. One afternoon, after Mittagessen at one of my relatives, I showed up in class with two American soldiers in tow. I had sauntered up to the GIs at the railroad station and asked them in my Swiss-German-accented and nervous English whether they, please, would come to my English class and tell us about America. Surprise! They understood me! "Sure." These guys were nice! They proffered chewing gum and cigarettes as we made our way out of the Hauptbahnhof. I thanked for the gum but declined the smokes. I had never seen, much less chewed gum until the GIs arrived and was unsure just how it worked. So I stuck the packet in my pocket, not wanting to seem stupid if I didn't have the right technique.

We crossed the Limmat at the Bahnhof Brücke, snaked through the narrow ways of the old city up to the Handelsschule, I pointing out landmarks and they mostly listening and seemingly understanding my elementary English. I couldn't have been more proud when we climbed the stairs of my school. There I was, a school boy next to these handsome American heroes in their snazzy uniforms. I had garnered them with a few English phrases and a smile. Our teacher, though surprised, welcomed them into the class room in fluent British English and invited them to tell us about America. Their words fled long ago, but the thrill of having had them in class has lasted. They were my first close-up Americans, not just strangers passing on a sidewalk. Yes, I did get an A in English and lots of questions from my classmates. How did I do it? How did I have the guts to just walk up to strangers, foreigners at that? My answers are lost, but if I had known the word at the time, I might have thought, even if not said: chutzpa.

America approaching

Chutzpa can be amusing; arrogance is enervating. My next American, close up and across a desk, was arrogance incarnate.

Now that Hitler's Germany had been vanquished, my relatives in America eagerly awaited me. The Swiss government just as eagerly wanted to clear out the uprooted and impecunious. The interned soldiers of all uniforms were no trouble, they wanted to leave, to go home, to see their wives, children and parents; they had survived or escaped the slaughter. We, people like I, had no place to go. Back to Germany was impossible. We had to wait until we received permission to come, whether it was from Argentina or America, South Africa or Australia; the doors were not automatically opened and red carpets were scarce. America had a quota, so many from this country of birth, so many from that. Only paperwork seemed quota-free. Fortunately, others took care of all that, Aunt Jenny, the Bollags, the Schweizer Kinderhilfe and, prominently, the United States consulate in Zurich.

One day, I was summoned to the consulate to be looked at, to sign this and that piece of paper, to be be fingerprinted. I still can see the young stuffed shirt with slicked-down brown hair, parted down the middle and combed from forehead to the nape of his neck, leaning back in his chair, feet on his desk, studiously ignoring the lady from the Kinderhilfe and me as we stood across from him, waiting quietly. It seemed like an eternity to me. Why in hell had he bid us come in just so he could snub us? He was the classic underpaid low-level functionary who waves the little power he has over those who have none. Once he deigned pay attention to us, the whole bit lasted no more than five minutes on this, the sixth of April, 1946. No American hero, that arrogant ass.

I knew between little and nothing about the machinery that eventually ground out the piece of paper that announced "Come and join us in the United States". First of all, Uncle Alfred, Aunt Helen and Aunt Erna had to guarantee, by way of an affidavit, that they would not let me become a public burden. They did so gladly, but it was a close call, because their modest incomes just barely peeked above the required minimum. After all, they had come just five or six years earlier with little but hope, optimism and the determination to be worthy of their new homeland. They were ready to sacrifice whatever was needed to give me the same opportunity they had been given.

Permission to come would have been meaningless if there had been no money to pay for my voyage, first to the ocean and then across it. Uncle Abra Gundelfinger in South Africa had promised to pay for my parents and me when there still seemed hope that all of us could reach America together, on the same ship. Would he still be willing to pay, now just for me? Telegraphed messages rushed between Zurich and Pretoria, one after the other, but moving money was no simple matter at the time, less than a year after Japan had surrendered. Uncertainty persisted. Aunt Jenny had done her share and more. With the line from South Africa so tenuous, Uncle Alfred, Aunt Helen, Aunt Erna, Aunt Lillian and Uncle George took no chances and pledged to pay for my trip, if necessary. Finally, Uncle Abra's money found its way to a bank in Zurich. One more hurdle jumped.

All the while the bureaucratic machinery churned, I enjoyed myself at the Handelschule, learning, riding the train, having fine Mittagessen at the Adlers and, never too often, lentil soup at Aunt Cilli, and, not least, flirting with the blonde from Stæfa. Even the too frequent boiled beef, boiled carrots and boiled potatoes at Aunt Jenny's and the squabbles at the Bollags never wiped out the pleasures of my good fortune. Gradually, bit by bit, as the days and weeks receded, I began to realize that my time with the Spoerrys, my time in this lovely land, where I was being treated so well by so many, where the shock of the loss of my parents had been cushioned by kindness and love, was drawing to a close. I wanted to stay, but knew I could not. I would be welcomed in America; still, the uncertainty of what lay ahead gnawed. I already had to adapt to two boarding schools and twice to new families, the Voneschs and the Spoerrys, besides new public schools and a passel of relatives. Would I be able to continue in school or be shoved into a trade, Bollag-like? Would my uncle, aunts and cousins still be the same, the same wonderful relatives they had been before all the upheavals and relocations? What lay ahead?

The future was important, but the present, the engrossing now, is a slip of a girl who stepped across the threshold of the Kinderheim Hebron this fall day in 1945. One look, and my heart races. She has the sweet expression and soft brown hair of my first great love, the little girl in Augsburg, in 1939, when I was eleven. No, it isn't she, it can not be she, because the love in front of me speaks fluent French. Her name is Lucette - from lux via lumie`re, the light, now my light - Wigno and she came from Monbéliard in France, only about 10 miles from the Swiss border. She is one of hundreds of children who are welcomed into Switzerland now that the battles have ceased, to mentally and physically recover from the strains of war in a relaxing atmosphere and with ample and nutritious food. And, by chance that turned out well for me, she now stands under the same roof that shelters me.

I know her name because I memorialized her and her address of more than a half century ago in my little blue book so I could write to her after she was back home in France. In a snapshot in my album, Lucette stands next to and slightly in front of me on the balcony at the Kinderheim, almost half a head shorter than I, slim, in a sweater with sleeves too short for her skinny relaxed arms; her right hand holds her left one in front of her vertically striped apron that reaches down to her knees. We both wear demure smiles that tell we would not want to be any other place than right there, next to each other, in the pale afternoon sun of that cool fall day.

How could I have wished for more? Here, at home, I can feast my eyes on sweet Lucette, a year or more younger than I, and on my way to and from school in Zurich, I enjoy the company of and the verbal jousts about school, politics, the world with the enticing but untouchable blonde from Stæfa. What luck!

At least Lucette is touchable, though only very chastely. As we talk, she in fluent, I in bumpy French, we sit next to each other on a bench or on the sofa, our arms touching from shoulder to our hands and our lower thighs and knees just accidentally making contact, at least when Papa Spoerry is out of sight. But, no matter who is within sight, our eyes speak unhindered, across the table or across the room.

Alas, this romantic interlude was short-lived. Lucette could stay only a few weeks and then she had to return to France, home to her parents. No question, none at all, before she leaves, I just have to, I absolutely have to kiss her. It was high time I kissed a girl and who more ideal than Lucette? She is my flame; we live in the same house; she enchants me. But, it wasn't so simple. I couldn't just walk up to her and plant a kiss on her cheek and ask for one in return; it just wasn't done, certainly not at the Kinderheim. Only a few days remained before I had to bid her good bye. I either had to be bolder than I dared to be or find some other way. I explained my lover's plight to Tante Erica. She rescued me.

Two or three days before the goodbyes, Tante Erica asked Lucette "*Werner voudrais vous baiser, est ce bon?*".- Werner would like to give you a kiss, is that OK? "*Oui, certainement!*" Oh, boy! Now, where and when were the questions. Papa Spoerry could not be around; he would not understand; he would raise a fuss, squared. Then came my chance. He had left and, a bit later, Tante Betli arrived. "Of course, why not?" she says. But, these are the rules: Only on the cheek and under the sisters' four watchful eyes. I don't care what the rules are, as long as I can kiss that girl. The time is here; the time is now. I lightly rest my right arm on Lucette's shoulder, touch my lips to her left cheek and kiss it. Now, her lips delicately touch my right cheek. Holding hands with Herzli, the auburn-haired girl, had been a thrill; these kisses were a revelation. How could a kiss, a simple kiss, tingle the whole body, from head to toe, from the skin to its depths? May be kisses are not as simple as I had thought. I didn't care who was watching; as far as I was concerned, the whole world could have been, should have been watching. I had kissed Lucette! I had kissed my first girl! Lucette kissed me! Wow!

The morning Lucette left, with everyone right there, we just shook hands, slowly, and smiled at each other as we said "*Au revoir*." We wrote to each other between Switzerland and France and between America and France. We wrote each other until one of us quit, when time and distance had absorbed the glow of the youthful flame.

Survivors

Two other girls entered my life about the same time as Lucette. I was shocked when I first saw them. They were skinny and pale, their eyes tired, their hair limp. They were Erica and Marion Neuburger, Aunt Jenny's two granddaughters. They had survived the Nazi concentration camp where their parents had perished and uncle Josef Adler recently had fetched them from Holland to live with their grandmother. What a contrast it must have been, the change from daily misery and fear to care and safety, to regular and wholesome meals, to comfortable and clean beds, to the sight of a beautiful park from the windows instead of barracks and barbed wire fences, to Aunt Jenny's unemotional, but still grandmotherly love that would shepherd them into a new, a normal life.

Both were a bit shy. After all, we were strangers to each other. Compared to them, I had been extraordinarily lucky. I had never suffered the hardships they had endured. While they existed, I lived. They saw their parents waste away; I remembered mine distraught but still full of hope and life when I last had seen them from the ferry that carried me to Switzerland, away from home, to safety.

Being young and obviously resilient, Erica a bit older than I, Marion a bit younger, they transformed themselves within months into lively teenagers who laughed easily and, understandably, revelled in their freedom from hunger, fear and oppression and in their new opportunity to attend school, to be just girls. We got along very well.

And that is what worried Aunt Jenny. It was a worry of which I had no inkling, of which I knew nothing until decades later, long after she had died. Erica, Joan and I were wandering along a woody lane in Winterthur on a fall day in the 1980s, reminiscing about the time when we, Erica and I, first knew each other. Marion and her husband were at their home, readying a *raclette* supper (a special kind of cheese melted over boiled potatoes) for all of us. Erica, who has an enjoyable talent for gossip, asked me whether I ever had noticed anything unusual when she, Marion and I accompanied Aunt Jenny on after-meal strolls in the park along Lake Zurich. No, nothing at all; my antennea had been insensitive: Aunt Jenny never let either of the girls walk with me alone, ahead or behind. Either Erica and Marion walked together, and I strolled next to Aunt Jenny, or one of them and I walked next to Aunt Jenny, one of us on her right, the other one on her left. "Why?" I asked, puzzled. Erica's enlightening revelation Aunt Jenny had been afraid one of the girls, or, *mal pensé*, both, might entertain romantic thoughts about me or vice versa. She wanted to take no chance whatever that one of her granddaughters, her heirs, would fall in love with me, a poor refugee boy with few prospects for prosperity. No way! If we had walked together, one of the girls and I, we might have exchanged sweet phrases and our hands might have touched, ever so accidentally. How funny and ridiculous. If either Marion or Erica harbored any romatic interest in me, they certainly hid it well. As for me, they just were two nice girls whose company I enjoyed, but neither of whom increased my heart rate one beat. No wonder I had not caught on to that stratagem. Poor Aunt Jenny and her groundless fears. All three of us eventually married our respective loves, loves that endured.

Time flies, time drags and a vision of beauty

The machinery of my emigration kept grinding along after that annoying session at the American consulate. Aunts Helen, Erna and Lillian and Uncles Alfred and George wrote how happy they were with the prospect of greeting me in the New World, where I would be like a son to them. But, whose son? I rarely had visited Aunt Lillian and Uncle George in Schwandorf; they had come to Mindelheim no more often. I knew them but little. In contrast, I had felt at home with Uncle Alfred and Aunt Helen and my cousins Walter and Hans in Memmingen just as they had with us in Mindelheim. I hoped, desired, was anxious that I would be able to live with them, where I would be in a reassuring, comfortable circle of family, not the same as with my parents, but familiar. Uncle George and Aunt Lillian had no children, a fairly large apartment and a business in Louisville where I would be able to work. The Heilbronners had no business and an apartment in Detroit already tight for the four of them plus Aunt Erna. The decision would be theirs, not mine; it would be made by those in Louisville and those in Detroit, and it would have to be made soon, because I was to leave for America in March, by way of France, Luxemburg and Belgium.

March was too soon for me. I was not ready to leave. I wanted to finish *Klasse 1e* at the Handelsschule in Zurich. Besides, I wasn't anxious to leave Switzerland, my friends, and, above all, Tante Erica. In my 17 years I had lived in six places - at home with my parents, alone in Herrlingen, in Esslingen, in Augsburg, in Herrliberg and, now in Mænnedorf, where I had spent almost one-fourth of my life. I just as soon would have stayed, if I could have. I knew staying was not even on the agenda, but I certainly was in no hurry to leave. Of course, I had absolutely no say as to when I would leave; that was the sphere of officialdom. Happily, the official mills ground slowly. Whatever the hold-up, the last of the transit visas in my gray cardboard-covered *"Certificat d'identité"* was dated 25 April, 1946. By then, I had passed my exams and professor Bimbo, the blond from Stæfa, bookkeeping, and juggling pounds, pence and yards were history.

Officialdom had told me to be ready to leave on short notice. My papers were in order. Now, the only question was transportation. Rails and roads in Europe were still cratered, bridges had not been rebuilt and links that worked were overworked. American troops and their war machinery were moving westward, toward home, now that the Japanese also lay prostrate. Tens of thousands of refugees were swarming over western Europe, eager to reach America, north and south, Australia or Palestine. They all needed transport.

I did get ready. I still had clothing I had outgrown, from underwear to sweaters to pants. No one at the Kinderheim could use them, so we staged a sort-of yard sale, an animal that had not yet evolved, at least not in Switzerland. Tante Erica and Mrs. Steiger-Lohr spread the word that I had used clothing and a bike for sale. With such things still in short supply and expensive, customer after eager customer showed up at the Kinderheim door that Saturday. Well before day's end, nothing was left: mended socks, undershorts, longjohns, undershirts and shirts, pants and sweaters, and hardest on me, my bike, all were sold, 10 Rappen for a pair of socks, 25 for undershorts, a few Francs for my dear bike. Altogether, I accumulated about 20 Francs, riches for me; pocket money for the long trip to America.

My departure had been ordained for months, but I had no time to brood over it. Until school was out in April, I had to study, exams to pass, to talk to my blond friend on the train, to eat Mittagessen at a different table each weekday, to pine after Lucette. And, I had to have a nagging curiosity stilled.

Ever since I had ogled that shapely woman in the green wet form-fitting bathing suit as she strolled by me on the beach of Lake Zurich, I had wondered what secrets might have been hidden under that woolen skin. No, not every day, or even every week, but every now and then that question popped into my mind, from nowhere and anywhere. Since it was that persistent, that curiosity, I simply needed to see what a nude women looked like, not half naked, on paper, in tones of gray or sepia, in a story about natives of Africa or Asia, but really nude, living, breathing, near me. But how, where and who? Then, one evening, before I fell asleep, inspiration lighted the darkness. It was perfectly logical and reasonable. There shouldn't be a problem: It wasn't desire, sensual desire, that propelled my thoughts, but just curiosity, an adolescent's healthy curiosity. I knew that sexual relations were out of bounds for a boy, that they should be reserved for marriage, that trouble would certainly follow any transgression of this injunction. These beliefs were ingrained in the culture in which I lived and Tante Erica had reinforced them when she answered my questions about boy-girl mysteries. She always had answered them clearly, calmly and openly; they always had made sense. No question about it, Tante Erica was the one, the one I would ask. There was no one else I could have asked. Yes, perfectly logical and reasonable it was. She treated me like her own son; she was there when I was troubled; she shared my joys. Yes, it was she who would show me her body, nude, to enlighten me. I was convinced. But, could I convince her? Would she agree?

Time was the essence, the enemy. The March date for my departure had passed, the real date would not be far off. The time was now, today. The young children were in their rooms, napping after Mittagessen. Tante Erica and I walked out in the garden and sat on the curved wrought iron bench in the right-hand corner. There, I asked Tante Erica, would she, would she please, let me see her naked, totally naked. It's not that I had seen her partially naked. I had not even seen her in a bathing suit. She didn't swim and didn't even own one.

"*Was?? Bisch Du verückt?!*".- What?? Are you nuts!? "That wouldn't be proper. No, I don't think I can do that."

The third room, the one next to mine on the right facing my door, was empty. No one would unexpectedly emerge from there. It would have to be during day-time. The squeak of the floor or of the hinge of a door would seem loud at night; during the day, it would be lost in the general household shuffle. Papa Spoerry was out on a massage call and Mama Spoerry was busy in the kitchen. No other adult was around. I was reading in my room that spring Saturday afternoon, with the door open.

"Yes, but no more than 10 seconds. No touching, none whatever, anywhere. Come in two minutes."

I was too amazed to register Tante Erica's expression. Did she smile? Was there a blush on her cheeks? Did my cheeks blush? I would finally behold a nude female figure! My curiosity finally would be satisfied. Half a minute, a minute, a minute and a half. Would minute two ever come? Eternity could not have been longer. It did come, the end of minute two. My shoes were already off; my socks moved quietly. There was nothing sexual about it, nothing. But, why then did my heart speed up? May be I just was scared. If someone did surprise us, no way would they understand; no one would have comprehended.

I turned the corner to my right, the door was open just a crack. "*Komm*" she whispered. I slowly opened the door. My breath stopped, my heart raced. There, on her bed she lay, absolutely still, her hands and arms folded over her abdomen. Before me rested a shape more beautiful than I had ever imagined, a transfixing body exuding softness, an enticing apparition, white with a touch of pink, interruped and enhanced by the deep color of the areolas and nipples of the breasts and the dark delta between the closed thighs. I stepped closer. So much to absorb, so much to resist. What a revelation! I hardly noticed when Tante Erica reached for the white sheet to cover her bareness. Had it been ten seconds, or five or twenty? What difference did it make? I had been allowed to view, to absorb, to mentally ingest the shape, the essence, the fascination inherent in a women's body.

Back in my room, I looked out of the open window, down on the village, the lake, the hills beyond and to the distant white mountains. Soon, I would have to leave this view behind, to carry it with me in my mind, as I would harbor the image of that soft white recumbent woman's body, a dream-like still life that just had captured me, both images that defy erasure.

"*Zufriede?*".- Satisfied? Tante Erica had quietly materialized. I emerged from my reverie, turned around, and planted a kiss on her cheek. We never again mentioned these seconds as long as she lived.

A few days after the revelation, I got the word: We, other refugees and I, would be leaving on Friday, the third of May, by train, to Antwerp. We were to assemble a day ahead of departure at the Zurich office of the Kinderhilfe to receive our papers, instructions on where to be with our possessions and at what time. Each of my relatives whose table I had been allowed to share this past year invited me for one last visit before my big journey to America. Everywhere, I was the center of attention; I lapped it up. My mind for now hid the reasons I was here in the first place, the dire fate of my parents, the travails of the past, the unclear future. I lived in the glow of praise and good wishes of the present.

One fare-well dinner I savored especially. Tante Betli and her husband, Fritjof, had invited me to be their guest once more, now leisurely, not hurried to placate Papa Spoerry in his disapproval of my visits to his outcast daughter and resented son-in-law. We talked of times past, of what my future might hold. I held Claudia on my lap and, one last time, played "*hoppe-hoppe Reiter*" with her. The good-byes came all too soon. Tears and kisses sealed our embraces, our wishes to see each other again, some day, some year. I again saw Tante Betli, now widowed, and Claudia, this time wife and mother herself.

No going-away-parties lubricated the mental transition from here, the place where I had matured from child to teenager, to no longer here, to new adventures and uncertainties. All my school buddies from high school had scattered, to other schools or to jobs; besides, I never had heard of such a party before, so I had missed nothing. I did pay good-bye visits to Frau Staiger-Lohr, the lady who helped about the Kinderheim and who every now and then had invited me for cookies and milk at her home, to Herr Kunz whose push had pulled me from 29th to ninth from one year to the next in the Jugendriege sports competition and who had introduced me to Sausser, that bubbly elixir of autumn; to the farmer with the cellar full of cider barrels; to the sisters who cared for problem children in the Kinderheim next door; and, above all to Lehrer Walder, teacher of and for a lifetime. All had been strangers just four years ago, all had showered me with kindness.

I had also had to pack all my goods, except the clothes I needed for the long trip. There were linen sheets and cotton terry bath towels, handkerchiefs and wash cloths, winter clothes and boots. Some of the towels were nearly indestructible: They had entered the family as part of my mother's trousseau in 1927 and they survived until well into Joan's and my marriage, first to dry us and our kids, and, later, the dog or the windshield of the car.

Lastly, I stuffed my featherbed, my blankets and my treasured horse-hair pillow into a big gray duffle bag and tightened and tied its rope. All was packed, except my emotions.

It was the twenty-fifth of April, 1946, my last day, my last night, in Mænnedorf, at the Kinderheim Hebron, with Papa and Mama Spoerry, with Tante Erica, my surrogate parent, my confidante, the one who had lightened and lighted these last four years for me, the one who more than anyone else, but my now lost parents, helped set my inner course toward adult life. No one came to question the light in my room that evening and late into the night, as we talked and cried and hugged. I was about to lose my third parent, she a son. If she was infatuated with me, as Uncle Alfred later deduced, rightly or wrongly, just from Tante Erica's letters I had invited the family to read, I was totally oblivious to this current; the thought never entered my mind, either under the sun or in my dreams.

The next morning, the twenty-sixth of April, a Friday, in some mysterious way, just as during my earlier dislocations, my possessions were picked up and ended up at the proper location, this time in Zurich. I can't figure it out; some incidents, no more important, pop up spontaneously and clearly while others, just as real, have been washed away by the flood of time.

I bent down to kiss Mama Spoerry good-by, the one who had cooked the meals that helped me grow taller than she was, the one whose firmness and discretion that chill winter night had protected Tante Erica and me from potential disastrous consequences, the one whose pervasive and quiet kindness persisted under the self-rightous tantrums her husband unleashed all too often. I kissed her, she kissed me; I thanked her. Tante Erica and I exchanged kisses and shed tears by the gate where she first greeted me just over four years earlier. To take leave down at the station would have bared our emotions for all to see. Words neither came nor were needed. Papa Spoerry opened the gate, took up my suitcase and we walked to the train station, side by side, silently at first. Once we reached the path I had taken countless times, in sunshine, rain, fog and snow, in bright abandon and running scared, where I had admired spring's flowers and reddened snow with my bloody nose, I again found my voice. We talked about the long trip ahead, about my relatives in America, about how I really did not want to leave but had no choice, how much I appreciated all the kindness he and his whole family had shown me, where I could feel at home, where I was not just a source of income.

We emerged from the tunnel under the tracks, turned right and waited for the train to come, standing a bit apart from the crowd. The train slowed down, we shook hands. "*Viele, viele Dank für alles*".- Many, many thanks for everything. I climbed the few steps up to the platform at the rear of a rail car, Papa Spoerry handed me my suitcase, I lugged it into the compartment and hurried over to the open window. We waved to each other. The train moved. He turned, and as he turned toward home, he pulled a large white handkerchief out of his pants pocket and brought it up toward his face. I watched him disappear down the slope into the tunnel. I shoved my suitcase under the seat, set my backpack next to me and sat down. My journey to America, to a new life, had begun.

Tante Erica had put a little package into my backpack, a packet I was to open only after I had left, when I was by myself. I now retrieved it, untied the dun-colored string that held it together, carefully unfolded the plain brown paper so I could re-wrap whatever would emerge. It was a book, "Switzerland to-day", a volume packed with information about and pictures of Switzerland, from Roman times to the present, published in English, for the throngs of visiting American soldiers. The book's cover has vanished, but the fly leaf says this:

THIS BOOK BELONGS TO
Werner Liebschütz

AS A SOUVENIR OF HIS
LEAVE IN SWITZERLAND

FROM THE 22. Okt. 1939
TO THE 25. April 1946

My name and the dates were filled in by Tante Erica. On the title page, she had distilled, in her clear, nearly vertical penmanship, these last four years in these words

Meinem lieben Werner
zum bleibenden Andenken an
Deinen Schweizeraufenthalt,
Deine Heimat, Dein Dich liebendes
Mami
April 1946

(To my dear Werner
as a lasting reminder of
your stay in Switzerland,
your homeland, your loving
Mami)

I next saw Tante Erica in 1980, the first time I again stepped onto European soil, where I retraced the path from the Mænnedorf railroad station, through the tunnel under the tracks, past my school, up the hill, past houses where vineyards had greened in spring, around the bend to the Kinderheim Hebron, unchanged except for overgrown shrubbery and tired paint. Greetings and kisses, anticipation and memories intertwined. She, now slowly, led Joan and me up to my earstwhile eagle's nest. We were astounded: The room had not been touched, except for being dusted, since I had left 34 years earlier. Not only that, but Tante Erica had saved my every letter and even the wrapping paper and the string from the packages we had sent her with little things for her birthdays or Christmas. Everything was here as it had been in 1946, except Tante Erica's mind. Alzheimer's scourge had started to rob her of the recent past, the past of five minutes ago.

Eight years later, Tante Erica was a mental skelton in a rest home. Her deep brown eyes were set at infinite distance, hollow, empty. She knew not where she was, who we were, or why we might be there to see her. Not a glimmer of recognition, not even a shadow of a mind. The past had ended for her and there was no future. How sad, how sad. She physically died three years after this last visit. I could not help but wonder whether my mind, too, would wither before my body would die, a frightening prospect.

Even in death Tante Erica is and has been with us almost every day of every year, for nearly half a century. At breakfast and lunch our slices of bread lie on the round, dark brown breadboard she had sent Joan and me as a wedding present. The prayer *"Gib uns heute unser tægliches Brot"* and a garland of heads of wheat are carved on the wide rim.

PART THREE

America, here I come

It's not that America was expecting me. I was just one among the masses of European refugees that were permitted to land on its shores soon after the convulsions and chaos now known as World War II and the Holocaust finally had been stilled by the United States and its allies, after six long years of heartbreak on every continent. No, it was not America that expected me, it was I who expected, eagerly looked forward to, and hardly could wait to see America once I came to accept I had no other choice. The trip would be an adventure, but what would it be like in the country that we had studied in geography, a vast space of arctic winter winds, stifling summer heat, hurricanes and tornadoes, huge cities and skyscrapers?

I wasn't worried, just curious.

The visits, the meals, the buzz these last days among my relatives in Zurich, left no deep impression. Only one event did. I had yearned for a watch, a genuine, excellent Swiss watch, an Omega watch, a watch I could wear to America, a time piece that would be a reminder of my years in Switzerland every waking hour. I had not nearly enough money to buy one of these precious things; at most, I had saved up half of what I needed, accumulated over birthdays, a Franken here and there, put into my pocket by Uncles Josef Adler and Victor Bollag and by the people who had bought my used underwear, shirts, pants and my dear bike, still black, but no longer shiny.

Uncle Victor listened politely when I explained to him what I wanted and told me my wish was not an impossible dream. The next day, he and I walked over to some non-descript building on a non-descript street, not to one of the luxuriously decked-out jewelry stores on the Bahnhofstrasse where I had admired wrist watches, stainless steel or gold, floating on red or black velvet in artistically illuminated display windows. We entered through a plain gray door, walked up a flight of stairs and down a narrow hall lined with half-glassed doors and windows with views to nowhere. Names were on the doors, each one followed by "*Uhr Grosshandel*" (watches, wholesale), or some variation thereof. About two-thirds down the long corridor, we opened a door, on the left, entered and were greeted by a balding, round-faced, middle-aged man as he rose from his chair and shook Uncle Victor's and my hands. Uncle Victor obviously had called ahead: Trays of watches, at least a dozen, were lined up on a counter next to the dealer's desk.

The watch man invited me to have a look at these riches. With a glance, I spotted the trays with the Omega watches. "*Wie viel koscht die Uhr?*"- How much is this watch? Joy! Whatever price the dealer quoted, it was about half the figures that had scared me in the glittering windows on the Bahnhofstrasse. Still, I didn't have enough money. He had cheaper watches, but I wanted a shiny stainless steel Omega, one that would last and look sharp. Uncle Victor and the balding man muttered a few words to each other as my eyes were glued to the trays and I wondered what to do, buy a cheaper watch or none at all.

"*Wie viel Franke huscht Du*?" I counted out my riches and came out at about 10 Franken short. Uncle Victor nodded, took out the difference from his wallet and laid it next to my money. I hardly could believe my good fortune. The balding man took the watch, bid me hold out my left arm, and fastened the leather band on my wrist. When he looked up, he saw my triumphant smile. I profusely thanked Uncle Victor, the watch man and floated out into the street. I had my Omega watch; I had the watch that kept me on time until I walked into the Türler watch emporium on the Bahnhofstrasse, more than thirty years later, to buy myself a new Omega watch, with Joan at my side.

> Zürich, 2 May 1946
>
> My Dear ones,
> I am now here at Mrs. J. Gundelfinger, my aunt, and Tante Erica called that we will be leaving here on 3 May, that is tomorrow, by way of Italy. You can imagine how excited I am. Please, notify Louisville. Will write from Genoa when the ship will depart.
> Fondly,
> Werner

That is what I squeezed, in telegraphic German and in legible handwriting, on the top half of a postcard I sent to Uncle Alfred, Aunt Helen and Aunt Erna in Detroit, who saved it for me. The lower half was wasted space.

Till this day, the second of May, I would be heading northwest at a still uncertain date, but now I would be travelling south and already the very next day, to Italy, romantic Italy, to the Italian Riviera, through the Ticino, the Italian-speaking canton of Switzerland, and across the fertile valley of the river Po, all places I had hoped to someday see when we studied history and geography with Lehrer Walder in Mænnedorf and Professor Bimbo in Zurich. Traversing the Alps, seeing northern Italy and then floating on the Mediteranean Sea would be much more exciting than crossing mostly flat France and Belgium to reach the English Channel. Such luck! No wonder impatience speeded my pulse.

What surprises me now is my formal introduction of Aunt Jenny, as "Mrs. J. Gundelfinger, my aunt", as if my American relatives did not know who she was, in spite of their exchange of dozens of letters before the attack on Pearl Harbor and since the surrenders, east and west. Contrarily, I named Tante Erica without further ado and no last name, about whom they had heard only indirectly, from me, and that for less than a year, only since the silence of the guns. I suppose a Freudian could conjure up an explanation.

Less than a week ago, I didn't know when I would be leaving, and now I had only one more night in Switzerland, less than one day more under Aunt Jenny's aegis. I am certain she was at least as happy for me that I could leave for America, toward the rest of my life, as she was for herself, now that she could shed her responsibilities for me. She now had her two orphaned teenage granddaughters to care for, quite enough for an elderly lady who never seemed to have been young. She finally no longer would have to worry that one them and I would become enamored of each other, with whatever consequences might follow.

I hope very much that I managed to show the gratitude Aunt Jenny deserved from me: She had saved my life, sustained me for six and a half years, engineered my move from Herrliberg to Mænnedorf, and lastly, she wagered her money that I would rather strain my brain than my arms. Yes, I owed her much, much more than I could ever have hoped to repay her by word or deed.

May 3rd, 1946

Early the morning of May third, a Friday, I met my fellow travellers and a lady from an organization for refugees under the lofty arching roof of the Zurich Hauptbahnhof. None of us had ever seen each other before; fate and travel space had thrown us together. There were seven us without a country to call our own, a gentleman, about 80 years old, short, stout, bald, hard of hearing and gracious, three women in their twenties, one shy, bordering on sour, one outgoing with a ready smile, and a short sassy one with notable physical assets, all brunettes. One of the other males was around thirty, with combed-back, straight, blondish brown hair, glasses, and a formal demeanor; the other one was two or three years older than I, tall, blond and fun-loving. I, at seventeen, was the youngest of us shipmates-to-be.

The lady official told us what to expect and entrusted all the papers we would need to the fellow with the glasses; he had the look and age of responsibility. We snaked our way through the crowded platform, through waves of Schwyzerdüetsch, Italian and the English of American soldiers on furlough, to our train, the express to Chiasso. In the exitement of the moment, I had completely forgotten about my steamer trunks and the duffel bag with my bedding. Then, just before we seven reached our car, we passed the baggage wagon as a freight handler shoved one of my heavy trunks through its wide open door. A quick scare followed by instant relief, my earthly possessions were here, just a car or two behind ours.

We stepped up into our coach, the old man first, much more agile than I had expected, then the three ladies, with Mr. Responsible last. We found our reserved seats. One last time I surveyed the platform from where Hanspeter and I had vicariously travelled to distant cities. Now, I was about to really travel, farther than ever before. A track master blew his whistle and waved the flat lollipop-like bulls eye on the end of a stick from side to side; the engineer responded with a short toot of the horn; a few late-comers jumped on board. The train started to glide silently over the rails. My voyage to America had begun.

"America" sounds vague and all inclusive. It stretches from the icy lands of northern Canada to the penguin roosts by the frigid seas at the southern tips of Argentina and Chile. But, to us, to almost any European at the time, especially to us refugees, there was nothing vague about "America". America meant only one place, one destination, the non-biblical promised land, the United States of America, the land I did not know, the land I came to know and love.

Once out from under the canopy of the station, the train gained speed, clacking over switches that connected the myriad of glistening parallel iron snakes that reached in all directions, into every part of Switzerland. I stood by the window, taking in last glimpses of the populated rump of the Zurichberg, of the wooded Uetliberg where Hanspeter and I not so long ago had scrambled up steep paths with boyish enthusiasm. As we rushed through the green rolling countryside, I finally sat down and relaxed, more or less. The known was receding, the unknown beckoned. I had a hard time concentrating as the seven of us told each other who we were, where we came from, what our final destination would be. The ties to Tante Erica, to all and everything in Mænnedorf, were unwinding as from a spool but still firmly attached, as we sped south. I was eager to meet the future, but would have liked for the past to come along with me, to sit next to me, to share the exitement.

I snapped out of my reverie when we traced along the*Vierwaldstættersee,* Lake Luzern, whose rugged shores had witnessed the founding oath of the Swiss Confederation, an event that saved my life six and a half centuries later. Without the guts and determination of these mountain men of long ago, I would have met the same fate as my parents, as others of my family and millions more, missed as individuals only by the few who had loved and known them but all forever etched into the collective memory of humanity.

As the train started its climb toward the Gotthard tunnel, a Swiss engineering feat that inspired legends and poems extolling the heroism of those who who labored to penetrate the mountains, I leaned out the window and snapped a last picture in the country I was about to leave. To the left, a bent, white, unbuttoned shirt-sleeve-covered arm sticks out of the window next to mine, an empty track and parked freight cars occupy the center and right sides of the photo, and, in the distance, a snow-covered peak floats above the mundane scene below. It's an amateurish snapshot, but for me it encapsulates the beckoning adventures of mountains and of travel on rails.

My ears felt the pressure of the rushing air being squeezed against the rock walls as soon as we were swallowed by the darkness of the tunnel. The soft yellowish glow of the dim bulbs on the ceiling of our car must have inspired romantic thoughts in the tall blond guy. He leaned over and kissed the cheek of the girl with the pleasant smile. She pulled away, in surprise, grinned, but did not return the favor. I wished I would have been that daring, not here on this train, but on the train to school in Zurich with my blond friend from Stæfa or on that winter day when Herzli, the girl with the chestnut-colored hair, and I trod side by side to sell postage stamps for charity.

The southern sunshine almost blinded me after the dusk of the tunnel. What a view! Another of the endless variety of gorgeous vistas in Switzerland. Houses plastered to the side of the mountain, a cluster of stone dwellings surround a church as sheep flock to a shepherd; ahead the wear-polished tracks wind among promontories of rocks, down, down the narrow valley as the wheels screech against the curved rails. Then, Lago di Lugano glistens in the distance, and, before long, Lugano itself arrives, the penultimate stop on Swiss soil. The fronds of the first palm trees I ever had seen waft in the warm breeze, fanning the red tile roofs of this subtropical enclave nestled against the protective southern flank of the Alps.

The train nearly emptied out in Lugano. We seven were among the few who were on board when we started up again, nosing toward Chiasso, the end of the run, the final miles before I would leave Switzerland behind.

All those in Mænnedorf were far from my present as we gathered around a one-women reception committee. I concentrated on what she told us. We would not change trains here in Chiasso for Genoa, our destination, but walk across the border, with her as our guide. Once on the Italian side, we and our possessions would ride to Genoa on a bus, not on a train. On a bus? How disappointing. I liked trains much better than busses, even though I had never ridden a bus before. From the outside, they looked like wheeled cages with windows where one had to sit still all the time. One could not walk from car to car, look at other people, stretch ones legs, check out the elegant dining car where well-dressed ladies and gentlemen chatted across white, starched table cloths set with plates of tempting morsels, glasses of wine and, next to the window, a vase with a carnation or two surrounded by wisps of greenery. But, we had no choice, a bus it would be.

We crossed the invisible line, Swiss uniforms on one side, Italian on the other. The lady did the talking for us and all went smoothly. We, and our goods on a big-wheeled wagon pulled and pushed by men, were in Italy, the third country in which I had set foot.

Surprise! Our bus looked like no other bus I had ever seen. Instead of a long wheeled metal box with windows and a roof, it was a short roofless tub, a convertible with its hinged canvas top neatly folded in back. Just one problem: How would we and all our goods fit into this conveyance? No roof, no luggage rack on top; we and all of our possessions had to fit into the tub with seats. By the time the luggage jockeys had loaded our suitcases and trunks into the back of the bus, only six passenger seats were left, not seven. Obviously, the old man needed a seat and the women, too. Standing was out of the question for the hours-long ride.

"*I weiss was.*" - I know what. I clambered onto the bus, over seats and luggage, found the duffel bag with my bedding, pulled it to the top, arranged it more or less like a modern bean bag and plopped down on it, the perfect seat for me, my throne on wheels. I was ready to roll. The rest of our septet took their seats, the driver started up, we waved to the frontier lady and off we were, to Genoa.

I sat high on the pile of luggage, ensconed in the softness of my duffle bag; the balmy southern May air caressed my face. I was king of the road. I had the best view. I was "*restlos glücklich*", totally happy.

We travelled through serene countryside, the southern foothills of the Alps, past the tip of pretty Lake Como, the city of Como and then onto the plains of the Po Valley. A few more miles, and then we saw why we were riding a bus instead of a train: A railroad bridge across a stream lay crumpled in the water. The driver slowed the bus and cautiously crawled it over the water on a pontoon bridge that bobbed up and down as we moved forward. On the far side of the river, houses lay in ruins, walls standing alone, roofs missing, all reminders that World War II had burned over this valley just a bit more than a year ago. Bridges the Italian partisans had not destroyed, the retreating Germans had blown up as they fled northward, and, for good measure, also houses that might have sheltered partisans armed for ambush. The scene was peaceful, silent as a graveyard littered with unburied skeletons. We seven, all of us safe on Swiss soil while the battles raged all around, quieted, each confined to her or his own thoughts until we stopped in a village somewhere in the Po Valley for our mid-day meal.

I worked my way down from my throne, over suitcases and seats, to the front of the bus and on to the ground. The ancient-looking gray stone building was brightened only by the frame of the entrance door, painted a fresh pale green, as if in celebration of the end of war, its violent deaths and with hope for the future.

I was the last to pass through the door, right after the bus driver. All was well: The aroma of something delicious greeted my nose. Somber as was the outside of the tavern, the inside was brightened by flowered white oilcloth table covers, similar to the kind that had covered the dining table at the Spoerrys and the kitchen table at home, in Mindelheim. It looked inviting. I suppose the inside of any eatery would have looked inviting to me at that time; I was starved. Whatever provisions the Bollag's maid had packed for me were long gone.

A plain off-white oval platter piled high with spaghetti coated with tomato sauce enriched with with bits of meat is centered in front of a man, at least twice my diameter, with a big head, firm-looking jowls, short unkempt brown hair and the arms of a weight lifter. He tackles the mound of steaming pasta with barely a glance at us, but with a skill I had never seen before. I pick a chair at our table from where I can watch him without craning my neck. He sticks the fork in his right hand into the spaghetti, gives it a twirl or two and, presto, a ball of strands, with a few loose ends brushing against his chin, is on its way to his open mouth. So, that's how one properly eats spaghetti!

Mr. Responsible ordered for all of us and all of us ate spaghetti. Maybe that was the only dish available. I kept watching the spaghetti man until I was served my pile, the platter set down by a firm-round waitress who might have been the expert's daughter. I took my fork, no other tool was given us, poked it into the fat strings, twirled it and and lost most of the load on the way to my mouth. By the third or fourth try, I lost nary a strand. Years later, spaghettini, the slim sibs of spaghetti, became my favorites. A fork full of these skinny threads offers more surface for sauce to adhere and also winds more tightly around the fork, lessening the chance of slippage.

As usual, I was the last to finish eating. The driver was already in his seat and the rest of our crew was clustered by the open door of the bus, waiting for me to climb over seats, trunks and suitcases up to my perch.

The flatness of the Po Valley seemed endless. I had never been anywhere where neither hill nor mountain range closed in the horizon. Here, green fields and sky met in a straight line, the landscape interrupted only by parades of trees, farmsteads, a village now and then. More spans in the water, more pontoon bridges for us to sway across; the calm of the countryside could not hide the scars of battles between the partisans and the Nazi hordes.

Finally, late in the afternoon, the silhouetted horizon rose into an undulating line. We were approaching the northern wing of the Appennin mountain range, the barrier that keeps the northern winds at bay along the Italian Riviera.

A rose glow hovered over the city as we wound down the road toward the Gulf of Genoa, as if in reflection of the sea of red tile roofs that spread before us. The gulf glistened in the distance, the first ocean I had ever seen. Sure, it isn't a true ocean, just part of a sea, but for me, it was an ocean. Lake Constance, the barrier that had separated me from my parents six and one half years earlier, was a puddle by comparison. We would ride on this gulf, out into the open Mediterranean, past Gibraltar, into the vast Atlantic. I lost sight of this vision, real and imagined, as buildings closed in around us. How did the driver ever manage to find our hotel through this warren of streets not much wider than alleys, little wider then our bus, as we came to the end of this long and amazing day? Morning in Zurich, the city of my heart, and now in strange Genoa, where the language was foreign, in a country that had thought and fought with Hitler.

We had arrived and I was hungry. Excitement, anticipation, digesting endless new impressions all feed on energy, even in a body comfortably at rest on a pile luggage.

My nagging innards had to wait. First, we all had to check in: name - strange to an Italian; address - none; passport - none, just a transit permit; then I had to haul my suitcase upstairs to our room, the blond fellow's and mine. The flights of steps seemed like the stairway to heaven, the destination ever elusive. We were on the top floor, immediately under the roof, just as I had been in Mænnedorf, now far away, two mountain ranges and an expansive valley behind my back. The haul had been worth the effort. The small window, no larger than the one of my aerie at the Spoerrys, opened toward the clutter of red tile roofs out of which poked skinny tin chimneys with vanes on top, like tongues testing the air. A massive castle with a square crenellated tower rose on the left horizon, a bell tower of a church toward the right, and, beyond this scramble, lay he Gulf of Genoa. Everything but the water looked old and dilapidated, but fascinating just the same. I was eager to explore the city, if we had enough time.

Supper, and still no word on when we would be sailing, the next day or the following week. None of us cared. It had been quite a day, a long day, that third of May, 1946. Tomorrow would bring whatever it cared to bring.

Forbidden Alleys, Graveyard of Ships

The southern sun lighted our room early the next morning. Silence reigned, as if we were the only guests at the hotel; just distant street noises, toots and caughs of cars and the clomping of hoofs and rattle of wheels on cobbled streets reached up to us when we let in air through the opened window.

The news at breakfast: No departure today; the ship was not ready to take us on. Time enough to tour the city! With part of Genoa still in shambles from Allied bombs, with a seemingly unfathomable maze of streets and alleys heading in all directions and none of us knowing more Italian than *ciao*, wandering about by ourselves seemd too risky. Let's hire a guide, one of our septet suggested. Mr. Responsible consulted with the hotel clerk, who had absorbed some German during the Axis years. Yes, he could get us a guide and, if we paid in Swiss Francs, which is what we had, the cost would be very reasonable. We, the six young ones, checked our finances, pooled our resources and, in less than an hour we had our guide. The octogenarian gentleman declined; his legs were too old to keep up with ours and his weak hearing would not be tuned to the guide's likely Italianate German.

Our tour guide inspires confidence. He is dapperly dressed, from his fedora, set at a slightly sassy angle, past a bow tie on a white shirt to his dark double-breasted suit. He is short, a bit wide in the middle, and looks at my camera with a gracious smile as he stands next to the three young ladies. Mr. R and I, my new Omega visible on my left wrist, crouch in front; my roommate, almost a head taller than our guide, smiles in the back as we pose, for whoever the photographer was, on a hill crowned with a Renaissance villa backed by a slender turret with an oval slit in the middle, like the eye of a needle. Mr. R. and I must have thought the tour to be a big deal: We both wore ties for the occasion.

We wandered past villas on expansive hill-side grounds and through narrow streets of the old section of the city where clothes lines with colorful loads brightened the dull façades of grimy tenements. We passed through the Piazza delle Vittoria with its grandiose Monument to the Fallen, to the Piazza Tommaseo, dominated by fronds of palm trees and through alleys so narrow that my outstretched arms and hands just missed simultaneously touching the ancient walls on both sides. These alleys had the special allure of being posted with large round signs: OFF LIMITS. I understood the words, but not the context. Off limits for whom? For American sailors and soldiers. Yes, but why?, I persisted. Our guide hesitated with his answer. He was a gentleman and obviously proud of his city. "*Strassen Damen und Ræuber*".- Ladies of the streets and robbers. Once he had jumped that hurdle, he explained that sailors and soldiers were lured by prostitutes, then given plenty of attention and wine and, when tired and drunk, were rolled, robbed and sometimes stabbed. When one of our three ladies wondered aloud about passing through this area, our guide assured us that we would be perfectly safe during the day, but we were to not even think about stepping beyond the OFF LIMITS sign between dusk and dawn, especially today, a Saturday.

I bought some picture postcards and stamps during our tour so I could tell the Spoerrys, my relatives in Zurich and, of course, Lucette about my adventures so far, plus two for my photo album and one last one to tell my Detroit relatives when we would be shipping out, once we knew the day.

The evening of the fourth of May had faded into night and we still were on hold. Just how long would we be confined to this old hotel? I was getting restless, wanted to get moving, to behold the ocean liner that would carry us to America. Then, right after breakfast on the fifth came the word: We were to leave for the harbor at eight thirty the next morning, the sixth. Finally we knew. My roommate and I decided that there was no point in sitting around itching for action till the sun set. We asked the rest if they wanted to come along and wander about the city, a city we likely would never again see. "*Warum net?*"- Why not? the sassy one asked herself and off we were, the three of us.

We turned left, out the open door of the hotel, walked a block or two, made another left and there it was, the OFF LIMITS alley. It was like a magnet; we could not resist its attraction. Our guide had told us it was daylight safe. We marched down that alley, three abreast, our Dorothy between the Cowardly Lion and the Tin Woodman, not on a yellow brick road, but on ancient cobble stones. We saw almost no one, not a single prostitute - not that I knew what one looked like; no tough guys, just a few gray-haired women in long mourning-black dresses with little lacy black caps, similar to yarmulkes, on their heads. Very, disappointing. Dull. Then, we heard church bells and knew the reason for the silence on the streets. We had lost track of the days of the week; it was Sunday and the women were on their way to morning mass.

Since we were more interested in killing time than in looking for trouble, we turned from the alley to narrow streets and, eventually, to the broad boulevards that connected the piazzas and were lined with Mussolini-modern buildings, pretentious boxes that shamed the heritage of the ancient Romans and almost two millennia of artistic imagination and craftmen's skills funded by churchly and princely wealth. We wandered beyond our guide's tour, toward the harbor, where the remnants of buildings still lived like ghosts, reminders of war's transgressions and revenge. I was happy that the Allies had bombed the shit out of the Italians and Germans, but the sight was depressing. We turned around, back toward our hotel.

I wrote my cards, all but the one to America, in case we would not be leaving tomorrow, after all. I entrusted them to the clerk at the front desk, really more like a cubby hole than a desk, hoping all would arrive at their destination, especially the one to Lucette. I did not want her to think I had forgotten that kiss, that epochal kiss under the watchful eyes Tanten Erica and Betli.

The rest of the day bored to its finish. I was eager to get moving, floating toward America.

The sun set. I slept. The sun had risen, diffuse behind a haze of humidity that nearly swallowed the castle, so distinct just yesterday under the blue Ligurian sky.

Breakfast and no contradiction: This was the day, Monday, the sixth of May, 1946, our day of departure. We would be sailing on the *Minot Victory*, from here, in Genoa, past Gibraltar, past the Statue of Liberty, into New York harbor. Now, there was reason to be excited, to be elated, to finally get going.

I hurriedly stashed my pajamas, toothpaste and toothbrush into my suitcase, wrestled it downstairs and wrote the card to Detroit: name of ship, date of departure, likely date of arrival, about nine days later. There was no guarantee that the post card would be delivered in Detroit before we arrived in New York, but I had to take the chance. The possibility that the ship's captain would radio ahead to some contact in New York never entered my mind.

Our trunks, suitcases, my duffel bag, all had magically reappeared from some recess and were piled in front of the hotel, we emigrants in a semicircle around our possessions, guarding them. And here it came, almost on the dot of eight thirty, a bus not much different from the one that had carried us here three days ago, except this one was equipped with enough space for the luggage and seats for all of us, including the lady from the refugee organization who had greeted us at the hotel on Friday. The constancy of this outfit was reassuring.

We helped each other load our stuff and when nothing was left on the sidewalk, we waved to the hotel clerk and off we were to the harbor, to the *Minot Victory*.

The docks were toward the right, where they had barely had been discernible from the top window of our hotel. The only docks and piers I had ever seen close up were little ones, on Lake Constance and on the shores of the pretty lakes in Switzerland, docks for people waiting for spotless white lake steamers. I figured everything would be much bigger, built for big ocean liners like the one that would carry us to our new lives, the kind I had seen in pictures in the *Gelbe Heftli*, when I explored the world on paper in my room in Mænnedorf. Everything certainly was bigger, but what a hideous mess, a stark jumble!

Shocked silence, then: "*Schau hier!*" *Schau dort!*".- Look here! Look there! We were at the edge not of a harbor, but of a graveyard, a tomb for ships. Bows, a mixture of black and rust, pointed skyward; smoke stacks seemed to float vertically on the rippled surface, their mother ship barely discernible below the water; superstructures bent, twisted, shattered on battle-scarred decks that reached just above the lapping wavelets. Was the keel resting on harbor mud or on top of another victim? Not a sight to gladden the eyes.

Where was our ocean liner? We had left the jumbled wrecks behind us, made a left turn and followed a dockside road for a short distance and then stopped. This was our ship?? This black-sided hull with peeling paint and rust patches, floating high in the water, this was our ocean liner? Sure enough, on the rounded stern, high above the water line, *SS Minot Victory* proclaimed its name. Our collective hearts sunk. This would be our home for more than a week, this totally unromantic vessel, this rusty tin can on the wide Atlantic?

A couple of stevedores unloaded our goods and set them on the dock. Now what? How would we haul all that stuff up that narrow gang plank along the side of the ship? Not to worry. Suddenly, or so it seemed to me, a crane swung out from the ship, directly above our heads, and at its nose hung an enormous net made of rope almost as thick as my wrist. The net descended, guided by an unseen force, and landed with a muffled thud. The stevedores unhooked the reinforced carrying loops of the net, opened it, spread it out and then helter skelter plunked half of our stuff - trunks, suitcases and the duffel bag with my bedding - on top of the open net, toward its middle. That done, these swarthy sweating men with muscled arms, wide shoulders and creased faces draped the loops of the net over the hook. One of the men waved his arms; the hook rose, the net tightened around the load and, in seconds, all I owned dangled in the air above our heads, swung out wide, over water. My heart nearly stopped. "*Gott, lieber Gott, lass des net falle!*" I hadn't prayed in I don't know how long. God, dear God, don't let it fall! I was scared I would lose the little I had, some of it originally packed by my mother in Mindelheim, six and a half years ago, when we would be separated for only a short time, a few months, at most, not forever.

Sighs of relief: The net was over the deck and out of sight behind the mustard yellow-to-tan railing. The net reappeared in a few minutes and again flattened on the dock. The men loaded the rest of our goods in the middle, and, as before, nothing was lost. With our possessions on deck, it was time for us to follow, though not bundled in the net.

We walked toward the gangplank. And there I noticed it for the first time; my eyes had been too busy watching that net. The image at the foot of this rickety-looking stairway was not that of a sailor, nor of a soldier. His uniform was neither blue as a sailor's should have been, and as my Bleyle sailor suit was when I was a kid, nor khaki-colored, the shade worn by the American soldiers that had come with me to school in Zurich. His uniform, from sharply creased trousers, short-sleeved, open-collared shirt, wrinkle-free and adorned with little squished-looking colorful strips of ribbon over the left pocket all were a light tan. He looked sharp, but not like a sailor. Well, it didn't look like much of a ship; may be he wasn't much of a sailor. "Let's go!" he called and assured us, in English, of course, that this contraption angling up the side of the ship was perfectly safe.

He led the way; the gangplank seemed awfully narrow, steep and long, made for sailors not landlubbers like we. Being well reared, we young ones let the old gentleman go first. If he made it, we would too. Slowly and steadily he climbed, holding on to the railing, his feet aided by cross-wise slats. Once the grandfatherly "sailor" was on his way, the girls followed in succession, then Mr. R. and the blonde kid; I was last. I kept my nose and eyes on the mildly wafting path. Looking straight down from more than a reasonable height - by a third of the way up, it was no longer reasonable - sent a distress signal straight from my stomach down into my groin and tightened my grip on the rope railing.

I made it to the deck without trouble, just panting slightly, more from stress than strain. The seven of us collected at the railing to take in the view from high over the water, and what a depressing view it was. The watery graveyard was even bigger than it had appeared to be from the dock; it stretched and stretched, along every pier and dock I could see, except ours. This battered iron and steel, twisted and stiff like bodies caught instantly by death, were the gravemarkers of ships that lay shattered and crushed below the surface of the now calm water. Landward, out of sight from the ground, but otherwordly from up here on the deck, an enormous pile of rubble stretches from left to right, like a hill, flanked on the left by a sole phallic turret and on the right by the two remaining walls of a six or seven-story building, each window a skylight to the far side. At its left base rise the ruins of another, smaller building; to its right I spot the remains of a tunnel entrance still blocked by the cascade of rubble loosened when partisans exploded the German ammunitions dump inside this artificial cave. Behind this elongated pile, a skeleton with eight arms juts skyward, a transmission tower bereft of connections. Are these the ruins of a power plant and railroad station? Whatever they once were, they now are a memorial to the savagery of war. In the year 2000, more than a half century later, the snapshot I took then has lost none of its impact.

That was the past, the recent deadly past, of which I had read in the newspaper or heard on the radio in Mænnedorf. Below us, on the dock, was life, noise, shouting, yelling and wailing. What in the world was going on? I looked down, over the railing. These cries and exhortations came from women, about a half dozen of them, in skirts or dresses so short and necklines so plunging that the two seams threatened to meet. Their arms alternately flailed and waved their hands; their hands sent kisses up our way; why in the world to us? Then, they threatened to jump into the water. It was quite a show these women put on, not for us, I finally realized, but for the sailors without sailor suits, who lined the rails on the port side. One of us, not I, quickly figured out that these ladies of theatrical sorrow were our sailors' shore friends, shoulders and more that had provided solace during the hours of leave, far from home. Now, these shore birds would have to entice new friends eager for solid ground and soft cushions, ready to learn Italian customs and spend the dollars in their pockets.

While we gaped and gawked, the lady from the refugee organization had set right whatever offical tasks needed to be transacted with the captain of our ship and now bid us farewell and a safe voyage. I am amazed that we, a passel of refugees, passed across the Swiss-Italian border, through still war-shocked Italy, into and out of our hotel, onto the harbor and our ship without a single delay or indignity, imposed by either a bureaucratic or military eager beaver. It was as if we had diplomatic priviledges. It's a bit late, but I bow my head in gratitude to whoever smoothed our way.

Everyone and everything destined for America was on board. Now, some of the seafarers retracted and stowed the narrow, teetery bridge we had climbed from land to ship just a little while ago while others retrieved arm-thick ropes that tightly had held the vessel to stanchions on the dock. A blast from the horn. My spine tingles. We are about to leave Europe, the continent of my birth and youth, where amazing luck and irretrievable loss had intermingled, where strangers had taken me into their hearts, and I them, where I had grown from a boy into near adulthood, where my head and heart had been enriched with knowledge. I was about to move from the sad and happy known into the puzzle of the unknown.

As the *Minot Victory* nudged out into the only passable channel in the Port of Genoa, we, all of us, waved goodby to the sailor's companions of the night, to Europe, to Genoa, the city from where Columbus had set sail to what would be for him and us a new world.

At Sea in a Nut Shell

I lingered on deck until the Ligurian coast had receded in the haze of the day. Only then did I examine our floating home. The deck was a clutter of vertical pipes some of which birthed smaller pipes, tubes that resembled inflated periscopes, pipes ending in cylindrical whirligigs, steel structures with wire ropes for lifting and maneuvering cargo, ladders clinging to smoke stacks, rigs that held life boats, which

I hoped we would not need, steel stairs from the main deck to a higher and smaller deck, poles with antennae and, dominating the scene, the main smoke stack. In the snapshot I have, the deck looks like an erector set gone wild. Open space was scarce.

Just as soon as I could, even before we were introduced to our cabins, I asked one of the crew how come they did not wear sailor's uniforms. "Because we're not in the navy; we're in the Merchant Marine." Whatever that was. This wasn't the time to go into details; besides, my English missed quite a bit, coming and going.

Our cabins, my foot. These were no cabins with view, or without; this was a dormitory without even a single porthole. Our steel beds were lined up on one side of the ill-lighted, low-ceilinged room and steel lockers took up part of the other side, next to the door through which we just had entered, I almost stumbling over the raised threshold. The three graces had their beds in a dorm just like ours, across the hall. I liked our room in the old hotel in Genoa a lot better. It was a long haul up there, but the sky opened outside the window; here, nothing but walls and the faint aroma of previous occupants. A bit down the corridor were the toilets, urinals and showers, two identical spaces, one on each side. The ladies stuck their noses in there and reacted with a joint groan and giggle. Blond kid: "We'll show you how to use urinals!" Sassy: "OK, I'll watch." Laughter and retreat.

After I had seen this, our floating hotel, it finally sunk in: We were on a war ship. It was gunless, at least now, but it had ferried soldiers into war and supplies to feed and clothe them. Now, on the peaceful sea, we, the seven of us, and the small crew, were almost its only cargo. We had plenty of space, but the space was nothing to cheer about.

I unpacked what needed to be unpacked and then headed out into the open air where seeing nothing but water beat seeing nothing but four walls.

We had no safety drill; I suppose it meant, if we had an emergency, there wasn't much we could do to save ourselves from Neptune's graveyard. No point in building false hope. The water was calm; lunch call drowned out worries of disaster at sea. We filed into the mess hall, a few steps above the uncluttered center deck. Here, finally, was a place not all steel and corners, an almost cheery room with windows and the enticing aroma of good food. Some of the crew already were eating, talking and laughing. We lined up at the laden steam table, age before beauty and youth. There was plenty of everything, meat, potatoes, canned vegetables, milk, warm-from-the-oven bread, dessert and oranges. These bright balls looked like oranges, but turned out to be lemons of oranges. First, the skinny peel stuck to the fruit as if glued on and, when it finally pulled off, the labor had hardly been worth the bother. They were sour, stringy and the segments seemed to be welded together. Welcome to Florida oranges. They weren't even an imitation of the Italian or

Spanish fruit I had savored in Mænnedorf once the borders again were open to fruits of the South. Their peel practically slipped off. All I had to do is poke my thumbnail under the skin, pull it up a little and the rest was simple. Most of the time I didn't even need my pocket knife to score the skin. Once peeled, the segments, one or more at a time, pulled apart easily, and, in the mouth, the first squirt of juice made the senses gloat with pleasure - sweetness and flavor. These Florida oranges, what a disappointment.

Lunch done, I was ready to explore the ship. I asked a member of the crew if I might see the engine room. "Sure." He warned me to watch my head before we climbed down and down, steep flights of steps, one after the other, into the belly of the ship. Being short has its benefits; I didn't hit my head even once on all those pipes and angled steel supports that seemed designed to crease skulls.

The air was hot, suffused with the acridity of oil, but the scene was fascinating. A whirling whining shaft as thick as the body of a man stretched horizontally almost the length of the engine room, supported by massive stands and attended by all sorts of other machinery as it turned the screw beyond the hull. I don't know how many questions I asked, but the mariner answered them cheerfully and he didn't seem to mind repeating and rephrasing the answer when my English reception was slow, hindered by the static of translation and engine room noise.

These men in tan might not be real sailors, but they were OK.

This first day at sea passed into a lazy evening of card games and talk in the mess hall. The night sky was hidden by the gauze of haze, no moon or stars to break the monotony. The steady hum of the engine somewhere below our bunks acted like a soporific; it veiled the exitement of the day. Haze still enveloped our little world on day two. Breakfast and not much to do. We four males were hanging out on the deck past mid-morning when the door to the officers' quarters opened, just to the left of the mess hall, and out stepped two of our ladies, the pleasant and the sassy ones, smiling broadly, with two officers behind them, their faces painted with self satisfaction. We had not seen the girls slip in there. How long had they been there? What had they been doing in there? "How did you manage to get in there, into the officer's quarters? When did you sneak in there? What did you do? Did you have a good time?" The pair just grinned smugly as the officers turned around and retreated into their quarters. Nothing said; nothing revealed; darn annoying.

With nothing to do, at least for us men, but eat, talk, rest and play cards, with nothing visible through the haze, not even another ship, time lost its definition. Then, the afternoon of day two, Gibraltar, that famous fortress in a rock, emerged from the vapor, its steep faces toward the east and toward us, on its south. Only dark strips of vegetation and lighter strips of bare rock penetrate the haze in my snapshot, no hint of its function as the guardian of the narrows that divide Europe from North Africa.

The water in the Strait of Gibraltar was as calm as that of the Mediteranean Sea had been since we had sailed out of Genoa; swells no higher than those stirred up by a small steamer on Lake Zurich patterned the water; no white cap in sight. The Rock had faded into the distance; then, from one minute to the next, as if someone were stirring a pot, whitecaps dotted the surface and the *Minot Victory* simultaneously started to move under our feet, up a bit, down a bit; up, down; up and down again, incessantly. Our floor, the deck, no longer stayed level. The shy young woman managed to reach the rail just in time to feed her lunch to the fish that glistened as they leaped out of the water alongside the hull. None of us ate dinner that night, except the old man. He seemed immune to laws of motion. "How come you're not sea sick?" I queried him into his better ear between trips to the rail, not wishing him the miserable trouble, just being curious. He had no idea, but he did not question his good luck.

An officer admonished us wobbly sailors that a full stomach was the best defense against sea sickness. Good advice, maybe, but with my stomach in my mouth, how could I keep anything down, even if I could move food past my curdled, wretched tasting, retch-coated tongue? All of us, save the old man, dragged into our quarters and plopped onto our beds, still miserable, but at least horizontal. We kept commuting to the toilets, the girls to theirs, we to ours. Sometimes I made it to the toilet bowl, sometimes just to the urinal. What a stench! It pervaded the whole dorm, trapped by walls without windows and no active ventilation. I tried to keep my eyes from seeing others on their way to the heave-ho; one look at the ashen faces and sour, turned-down mouths just aggravated the work of the waves.

I had never been sea sick before. What misery! Such helpless bondage to the churlish sea and my own rebelling innards. It was going to be one very long trip.

An hour or two into darkness, we three young guys couldn't stand it any more in that invisible cloud of stink. We grabbed our blankets, pulled off a few extra from vacant beds, and headed out to the deck, into the fresh breeze as the 'Minot Victery' cut through the chop. What a relief! We each opened a wood-and-canvas deck cot, curled up the best we could and managed to sleep at least some of the remainder of the night.

At first light, what a sight! I couldn't help laugh, irking my empty stomach. The two other guys' faces were black, as if painted for a minstrel show. We had covered our rumps and blankets with pieces of canvas to keep out the night chill, but not our heads. Oily soot from the smoke stack had quietly settled on our faces while we slept.

By now, my miserability score had lowered from near ten to about five. I hoped it wouldn't shoot up again when I had to pass into that reeking air to take care of my bodily needs and to stand under a cleansing hot shower. The girls were still in their bunks, their faces the shade of sheets in dire need of some chlorine in the wash water. We men urged them to take themselves outside, into the fresh air; they would not budge. They were too weak, too wobbly, too this and that. They would not come; they insisted in staying wrapped in their woe. A member of the crew came to hose down the mess in the restrooms and urged them to get out and breath some fresh salt-laced air. Nothing doing.

We fellows donned some fresh clothing and gingerly headed for the mess hall, for some tea and toast, both of which agreed to stay down. Finally, about mid-morning morning, the ladies appeared, pale but dressed in clean skirts, neat blouses, and ordered hair. In a snapshot I sneaked, two of them and the two other young fellows are stretched on cots on the sunshine-bathed deck. Mr. R's head rests on his folded arms and the blond kid has his relaxed legs curled against his stomach and his right hand holds a hat over his face. Miss Pleasant's partly raised head smiles wanly at me. Sassy is stretched out flat, looking in the other direction. Not a scene from a ship of fun.

By evening, I managed a light meal and the next morning I was back in full command of my innards. And, did they ever appreciate the miracle called bacon. I had eaten ham before, but never bacon, fried crisp, aromatic, flavorful, and plenty of it, until here on our ship.

The *Minot Victory* kept slicing through the waves, up a bit then down, up then down. By now, my system had adapted to the unsteady deck and I wandered about to watch what the crew was doing. I heard a scraping somewhere, followed my ears and, by golly, this guy in tan pants and T shirt was sitting on a board dangling from some ropes at least ten feet down on the hull. I darn near reverted to stomach distress. There he was, scraping off loose paint and then plastering the wound with paint, with nothing between him and the waves but a board on strings. How absolutely crazy. Not that I had ever intended to become a sailor, but I had never known that sailors had to have the nerve and agility of trapeze artists.

We young males took no chances with confined air that night; we settled down on our cots right from the start. Now, we knew enough to cover ourselves with canvas from head to shoes, to keep soot out and body heat in. We were beat enough from our encounter with Neptune's revenge
to sleep well on our sparse cots.

The days passed, one like the other, card games, eating, talk, boredom; nothing to see. At night, we again slept in our beds. We had been out seven or eight days, all by ourselves on the vast Atlantic, and had spotted just one ship, Europe bound. From our distance it resembled half a banana peel floating on water. For entertainment, modest as it was, I watched the bow meet the waves, and, like explorers of old, searched the horizon for land. The breeze slid by my face, through my hair, and the soot headed backward, toward Europe. Nothing bothered me, neither the past nor the future. Under my feet was only a nut shell on the ocean, but it was headed in the right direction.

With so much time to talk and listen, to be together for days on end, with little diversion, how come I remember no names, no stories of the lives of the other six refugees and their lost years? Where had they grown up, lived, and from where had they been displaced? Had they suffered or been safe like I? Had they, too, lost parents and other relatives? Where were they going and what did they expect? Nothing remains. Strange.

That afternoon, the ride up front livened. The waves had grown and, as bow and wave met, spray washed off the railing and sea foam wet my face. Before long, an officer ordered me back to the main deck. A storm was approaching. When I reached the deck where we had slept under the open sky, a sailor already was stretching heavy rope from a handle just outside the door to our quarters to solid supports along the deck until he had reached another handle, this one next to the door of the mess hall. He told us that we might be in for quite a ride and that, until the storm subsided, we were to grasp that rope whenever we moved on deck and that we were to be on deck only to commute between our dorms and the mess hall.

Having loved to watch the shatter of thunderstorms in the mountains from behind a safe window, I now was eager to see and feel just what thrills a storm at sea could provide. Provide it did.

Bracing my feet against the roll of the ship and grateful for the steadying rope, I crossed the deck. As I stepped up the few rungs to the mess hall, I could see the churning blackness topped by white foam to my right. I had to let go of rope and rail to open the door to the mess hall against the roll of the ship. I couldn't even hold open the door for those right behind me, the old man and Mr. Responsible who steadied him against the rage of the Atlantic. The mess hall smelled invitingly, as always. How did the cook manage to keep a level head and the contents in the pots and pans with the shifting floor below his feet? He even had cooked soup. The captain, conscious we lacked sea legs, assigned a crew member to serve us our food instead of having us lurch from steam table to our chairs. I was a bit slow in grabbing my bowl of soup after the waiter for the evening had set it down in front of me. In that second, it scooted the length of the table; I could already see it splash all over the floor. But no, the flange around the edge stopped the bowl and not a drop spilled. I had wondered at our first meal on the ship at that ridge that creased my wrist. Now, I knew its purpose: to save my soup.

I heeded the officer's advice from our first day on the choppy Atlantic and amply weighted my stomach right through dessert. If food could keep my stomach steady in a storm, I gladly took the medicine.

None of us was eager to leave the cozy, well-lit mess hall for our spartan night-time quarters. Crossing that unsteady, salt water-wet deck, with the roar of the wild deep in our ears, would be no Sunday stroll. Here, with the mariners right with us at the center of the ship, danger seemed more remote than it would be in our isolation near the stern. No one admitted to being scared on this little shell of ours, but our laughter and our voices had the nervous edge honed by potential danger not openly admitted.

The storm had intensified and sea water sloshed about the deck by the time we retreated, single file, jackets zipped against the wind, Mr. R. shepherding the old man, toward our beds. We all safely reached our outpost. Not being an acrobat, I had to sit on my bed to change to my pajamas as the floor lurched under me. The trek down the hall to the bathroom was a dance with gravity, now here, now there, but with lady gravity, not I, in control. Could I stand, or should I sit? that was the question. The water sloshed in the toilet bowl, from side to side, like a mini ocean. I chanced to stand. I held on to the water pipe that fed the flusher of the urinal and used the other hand to keep the stream within bounds. Such fun!

I felt the first tremblor on my way to back to bed.

The ship stopped. The ship shuddered, creaked and rushed downward. The ship climbed, pressing the floor against my feet. Within seconds we again stopped, shuddered, creaked and dived once more. I held on to anything grabable till I could plunk on my bed, scared. Was the ship about to fall apart and dump us into the wild sea? None of us landlubbers had any idea why the ship stopped and then trembled, as if also frightened. No one was about to brave the trip to the crew quarters to gather facts and reassurance. On other nights, we had closed the door to our dorm, just as the women had closed theirs, but on this night, we kept both open. No one wanted to be isolated. In numbers there was safety, at least in our minds. We had no way to reach the crew. We were worried. What was it that rattled the ship and our nerves? We could tell that it was not the pounding of the waves against the hull, the furies outside; it came from inside the very structure that enclosed and protected us, so far. Would it hold? Were we in immediate danger?

None of us slept that night. The sudden rise, the enervating shudder, the groaning of the hull, the plunge, again and again, without pause, all night long. It was a very slow night. We still rocked at dawn - up, stop, shudder, down; up, stop, shudder, down - when a mariner quickly opend the door and the wind slammed it shut behind him. We were alone no longer. We crowded around him. What is going on? Why the shudder and creaking? Is the ship about to fall apart? How far are we from land? How much longer will it storm?

The mariner at least sounds calm:
"The ship won't crack open, it's been through storms before; the hold's almost empty so we easily ride up a wave, then, when we are on top, the screw is out of the water for a few seconds, races like crazy and shakes our ship and rattles your nerves. OK?"
Now we know, at least and at last, after a very long night.
"How long the storm? A while more, likely most of the day and into the night."
Collective groan.
"How long to land? Depends on when the storm lets up. Right now, we're mostly going up and down instead of forward, and did all night. And, by the way, we're headed for Baltimore, not New York."
"What? Where? Not New York? How come? But, all of our relatives expect us there!"
"Hang on. Baltimore is just a bit south of New York, right near Washington; no big deal. They'll know this morning; the captain radioed to shore; somebody will call the refugee outfit and they'll call your folks and tell them to meet you at the train station in New York."
"Why are we going to Baltimore?"
"I'm not really sure. Something about stray leftover mines this side of New York."
"You mean we could be blown up?"
"No, not down here. Quit worrying, you'll be all right."

Easier said than done. First this hellish storm, still raging, and now mines in the water and Baltimore, not New York, no Statue of Liberty, just plain America. Not all bad, though. I would get to ride a train, right my first day in America. All right!

Still, a whole day more of this roller coaster ride to nowhere. I'll take a mountain thunderstorm any day or night. It comes; it claps and fires; it passes on; the hotel stays on solid ground. Sailoring is not for me.

Our guardian told us to hold on tightly to the rope as he followed us to the mess hall.

Now, I could see them, not just feel them, the huge waves. Black trough, white crest; up, stop, shudder, down; black trough, white crest; up, stop, ... Wind whistles around my ears. Our ship is like a toy boat in the tub with a rambunctious kid; waves crash over the foredeck as we duck into the mess hall.

Breakfast was simple that morning, oatmeal, toast, an unpeelable Florida orange and drinks only half way to the rim. Just getting myself and the tray to the table tested my sea legs; trying to keep steady was like balancing on the pivot of a teeter totter, one leg up, the other one down as two wild boys take turns riding it like a bronco. All of us were in good shape; no one was sea sick and laughter filled the room as we watched each other lurch from steam table to safety-rimmed eating table.

None of us headed back to our claustrophic, isolated quarters after breakfast. Somewhere up front was a windowed space that let us look ahead, down the slope, up the hill, wave after wave scrubbing the bow of the *Minot Victory*, our unsteady home. I watched in fascination, a mixture of bravado, as if I were the one who was braving the mad ocean, and of apprehension at the fragility of our situation.

So passed the day and it brought good news, a double dose. The storm would ebb by late evening and by sunrise we would see land, America, the promised land. By dinner, the waves had calmed to hills. The ship's screw no longer ran wild in air, shaking the vessel, our innards and composure.

All of us bunked early. We were beat, from lack of sleep the night before, from the exitement and fear of being at the mercy of wind and waves. All of us longed for a good night's sleep before the dawn of our new lives.

Sunrise in Western Sky

I was the first to stir. Those early trains to school in Zurich had set my body clock to anticipate the day. Dawn seeped through the windows of the doors, the one of our room and the one from hall to deck. I quickly and quietly dressed. I wanted to be the first one to see America, to meet it by myself, alone, undisturbed. I wanted the scene to be engraved in my mind as long as I lived.

I hurried to the bow. The ship was gliding as if on ice, cutting through the water with just a splash far down on each side of the keel. Scattered clouds enlivened the waking sky. Just a hint of sunlight escaped over the line between sea and air. The coast took on shape, a dark line on the horizon, protruding here, receding there. A few minutes passed and then the clouds burst into light, silver to gold, as if blazing from within, rays of sunshine bound one cloud to another in the morning dampness. Now, the water caught fire, first pale and then orange. Sky and water united to greet this glorious day as we slid into Chesapeake Bay.

America had risen before my eyes in spectacular promise, this morning, the eighteenth of May, nineteen hundred and forty-six.

APPENDIX

Epilogue

I expected the last period after the last sentence of the first draft of this story, the story of my early years, to release a "Whoopee! I got done!" How totally different and unexpected was my reaction. The last dot expelled a lightning-fast reel of the highlights of my childhood and youth, a second-long summary of what I just had ended. Then, I sobbed and sobbed. For joy at having finished? Overwhelmed by the summary that flashed through my mind? Exhilerated that I could do it at all, to cram into words and sentences the joys and burdens of the first 17 years of my life? Unburdened of the load of a lifetime? Some of all, I suppose, but mostly the last, I think.

From Baltimore we travelled in a grungy train with dirty windows, so totally opposite of Swiss trains, to New York where Aunt Erna, Aunt Lillian, and the Guggenheims, Aunt Malchen, Uncle Benno and Ilse, met me. After a whirlwind of sightseeing and indulging in Aunt Malchen's fabulous cooking and baking, Aunt Erna and I set out for Detroit, by Greyhound bus. The rails were strikebound.

The joyful reunion with Uncle Alfred, Aunt Helen, and Walter - Hans still was in the Army - at 11808 14th Street folded me into the Heilbronner family, a safe haven where I felt at home, where I accustomed myself to my new country, absorbed education, and grew into manhood. Their and Aunt Erna's generosity of heart and purse guided and encouraged me through a year and a half of high school, in college and into my life as an adult. After Joan and I had married, they embraced my own young family as an extension of theirs.

Soon after I had arrived, Uncle Alfred strongly suggested that I change my last name to something more pronounceable in English than Liebschütz. The eponymous brother of my grandfather, who had emigrated to Detroit in the late 1800s, had his name mauled into *Libeskutz,* which Uncle Alfred and Aunt Helen considered an insult to the ears in any language. They suggested and I agreed to Lipton; it shares the same two initial letters with my original name and anyone can pronounce it correctly. Have I ever regretted the change? Occasionally.

I worked my butt off in school and, on weekends and during vacations, as a bag boy at Wrigley's Supermarket on 7 Mile Road and Wyoming Avenue, for 75 cents an hour and later as a stock boy at Suffrin's store for men. I wanted to earn enough so I could pay for most of my college education. During a year at Wayne University I discharged some basic courses and then transferred to Michigan State College where I earned my bachelors and master's degrees in Horticulture and was awarded scholarships and a research assistantship. In 1953, Joan and I drove across the country to the University of California at Davis so I could slave for and earn a doctorate in plant physiology. That accomplished, I conducted research with the United States Department of Agriculture in Fresno, a 30-year career during which I welcomed Mondays almost as much as Fridays. I concluded my professional life with nine years as Science Editor for the American Society for Horticultural Science, the culmination of my love affair with English and horticulture.

Joan and I first met in high school, Cooley High in Detroit, but but did not woo each other till later. We were married in 1952, had four children - Carol, Ronald, who tragically died when seventeen, Marian and Alan - and now have seven grandchildren. We no longer are young, but our love affair still blooms. Together, mountains shrank, depths grew shallower and fun has lightened our years.

Glossary of Family, Relatives, Friends and One-time Strangers

Abra, uncle. see: Gundelfinger, Abraham
Adler, Edith; wife of Josef; daughter of Jenny Gundelfinger, lived in Zurich, died 1966
--, Erich; older son of Josef and Edith, died 1981
--, Georg (George in U.S.); younger son of Josef and Edith, emigrated to U.S.
--, Josef; husband of Edith, died 1950
Alfred, uncle. see, Heilbronner, Alfred

Bach, Helene; my maternal grandmother, neé Gundelfinger, lived near Munich, died 1907
--, Isidor; my maternal grandfather, died 1935 (not related to Max Bach)
--, Margot; half-sister of my mother
--, Regine; my mother's stepmother, died 1970
Bach, Berta; oldest sister of my father, wife of Max, murdered by Nazi Germany in a concentration camp, about 1943, had lived in Munich
--, Heinz; son of Berta and Max, emigrated to Australia at 17, detached himself from remaining family in late 1950s; one of my three first cousins
--, Max; husband of Berta, same fate as Berta met
Bachmann, Elisabeth; sister of Erica Spoerry
Baehr, Elsa; distant cousin, on father's side; neé Seligman; lived in St. Gallen
Betli, Tante. see: Bachmann, Elisabeth
Bollag, Hanspeter; younger son of Victor and Martha, died 1991
--, Jürg (George in U.S.), older son of Victor and Martha, emigrated to U.S, died 1978
--, Martha; wife of Victor, lived in Zurich, died 1977
--, Victor, husband of Martha, first cousin of my father, died 1966
Bollag, Claire; wife of Siegfried, daughter of the Seligmans of Echallens, died 1965
--, Doris, daughter of Siegfried and Claire
--, Gaston, son of Siegfried and Claire
--, Siegfried, brother of Victor, first cousin of my father, lived in Lausanne, died 1953

Cilli, aunt. see: Ehrlich, Cilli

Edith, aunt. see: Adler, Edith
Ehrlich, Cilli; cousion of my mother; neé Gundelfinger; lived in Zurich
--, Liesel; daughter of Cilli Ehrlich, died 1991
Einstein, Lydia (cousin of my father) and Moritz; with whom I lived in Augsburg; both murdered by Nazi Germany in concentration camp

Elsa, aunt. see: Baehr, Elsa
Erica, Tante. see: Spoerry, Erica
–, (Neuburger); granddaughter of Jenny Gundelfinger
Erna, aunt; see Landsberg, Erna

Father. see: Liebschütz, Jakob
Feinstein, Hans; husband of Selma, died 1966
--, Selma; wife of Hans, first cousin of my father; sister of Victor and Siegfried Bollag, lived in Zurich, died1968
Friedman, Georg (George in U.S.); husband of Lilian, had lived in Schwandorf, emigrated to U.S., died 1950
--, Lilian (Lillian in US); sister of my mother, wife of Georg, neé Bach (not related to Max Bach)
Fries, Jakob; boyhood friend in Mindelheim

Gellhaar, Lilly; niece of Uncle Georg Friedman; emigrated to USA
George, cousin. see: Adler, Georg
George, uncle. see: Friedman, Georg
Girls of interest, nameless; in Augsburg, Herrliberg, Mænnedorf
Gonser; family who was our landlord in Mindelheim
Grandfather, maternal. see: Bach, Isidor
--, paternal. see: Liebschütz, Samuel
Grandmother, maternal. see: Bach, Helene
--, paternal. see: Liebschütz, Mina
--, step. see: Bach, Regine
Guggenheimer, Benno, Malchen (sister of Alfred Heilbronner) and daughter Ilse, had lived in Ulm, emigrated to U.S.
Gundelfinger, Abraham, first cousin of my mother, emigrated to South Africa
--, Jenny; aunt, by marriage, of my mother; neé Johanna Nahm, wife of Benno Gundelfinger, died 1951

Hans; see Heilbronner, Hans
Heilbronner, Alfred; husband of Helene; had lived in Memmingen, emigrated to U.S., died 1973
--, Hans; younger son of Alfred and Helene, one of my three first cousins
--, Helene (Helen in U.S.), sister of my father, wife of Alfred, died in 1980
--, Walter; older son of Alfred and Helene, one of my three first cousins, died 1998
Helen, aunt. see: Heilbronner, Helene
Hundegger, Adolf; playmate in Mindelheim

Jenny, aunt. see: Gundelfinger, Jenny
Joan; my wife, neé Lindskold

Karl. see: Vonesch

Landsberg, Erna; sister of my father; had lived in Mindelheim with us, emigrated to U.S., died 1990
Liebschütz, Fanni; my mother, neé Bach (not related to Max Bach), lived in Mindelheim, murdered by Nazi Germany in concentration camp, 1943
--, Jakob; my father, same fate as my mother
--, Mina; my paternal grandmother; lived with us in Mindelheim, died "of natural causes" in Theresienstadt concentration camp, 1944
--, Samuel; my paternal grandfather, died 1930
Leni; sister of Erica Spoerry
Liesel. see: Ehrlich, Liesel
Lillian, aunt. see: Friedman, Lilian
Lucette. see: Wigno, Lucette
Lucie. see: Vonesch

Marion, (Neuburger); grandaughter of Jenny Gundelfinger
Martha, aunt. see: Bollag, Martha
Mother. see: Liebschütz, Fanni

Seligman, Benoi^t and Julie; parents of Claire Bollag, lived in Echallens
Sittler, Bærbel (Barbara?), best friend of Erna Landsberg in Mindelheim
Spoerry, Erica; daughter of Papa and Mama Spoerry, in charge of children at Kinderheim Hebron in Mænnedorf, where I lived for 4 years; died 1991
--, Mama; mother of Erica
--, Papa; father of Erica, owner of Kinderheim Hebron
Strasser, ?; daughter of Gregor, one of Hitler's early followers

Trapp, Werner; boyhood friend in Mindelheim

Victor, uncle. see: Bollag, Victor
Vonesch, Karl and wife; owners of Kinderheim Rütibühl, above Herrliberg, where I lived for 2-1/2 years; son Karl (?), daughter Lucie

Walder, Emil; teacher and mentor
Walter, cousin. see: Heilbronner, Walter
Weil, Bella, cousin of my mother; murdered in a concentration camp by Nazi Germany
Wigno, Lucette; briefly guest at Kinderheim Hebron
Wirz, M.; teacher in Wetzwil

Glossary of Places of Importance in my Childhood and Youth

Augsburg, Germany; where I briefly lived with the Einsteins before I emigrated to Switzerland

Baltimore, Maryland, United States; port of arrival, May 1946

Detroit, Mich.; U.S. home of the Heilbronners and Erna Landsberg

Echallens, Switzerland; where I visited Claire Seligman's parents' farm
Esslingen, Germany; location of boarding school

Forch, Switzerland; from where carried groceries on bike or skis to Kinderheim Rütibühl
Friedrichshafen (on Lake Constance), Germany; where I last saw my parents; October 1939
Genoa, Italy; port of embarcation to the United States, May 1946

Herrliberg, Switzerland; town nearest Kinderheim Rütibühl, location of upper elementary and equivalent of junior high schools
Herrlingen, Germany; location of boarding school

Lausanne, Switzerland; where the Siegfried Bollags were my vacation hosts
Louisville, Ky.; U.S. home of the Friedmans

Mænnedorf, Switzerland; location of Kinderheim Hebron (the Spoerry family)
Meilen, Switzerland; home of Elisabeth Bachmann, sister of Erica Spoerry
Memmingen, Germany; home of the Heilbronners
Mindelheim, Germany; where I lived with my family until I emigrated to Switzerland at age 11.
Munich, Germany; place of my birth; home of the Bachs, my maternal grandparents, and of Max and Berta

Romanshorn, Switzerland; port of entry, October 1939
Rütibühl, Switzerland; location of eponymous Kinderheim owned by the Voneschs

Schwandorf, Germany; home of the Friedmans

Wetzwil, Switzerland; location of elementary school nearest Rütibühl

Zurich, Switzerland; where the Adlers, Victor Bollags, Cilli Ehrlich, the Feinsteins, Jenny Gundelfinger lived; where I attended the Handelsschule

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I received this book from my friend Werner Trapp in December, 1999, about six months after I had completed the third draft of Part I, my memories of Mindelheim. The author seems to be at least a decade older than I, judging by his descriptions of some places and events when he was young. When I read the book, I was pleased that the author also was enamored of watching the blacksmith work, and that I correctly remembered the location and general appearance of the cemetery and of the kindergarten.

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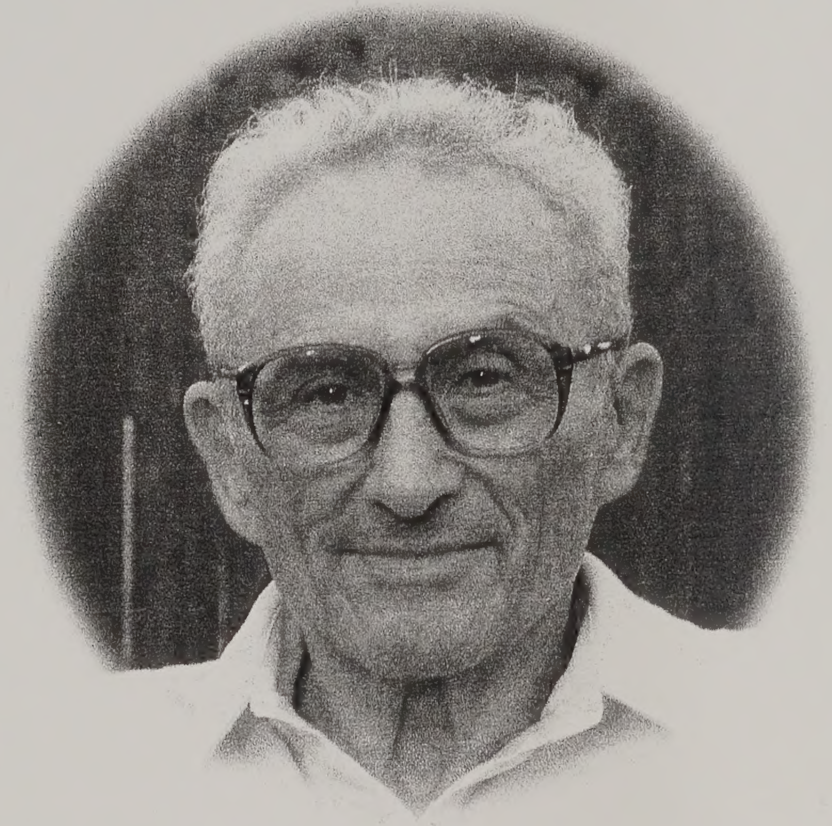

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